

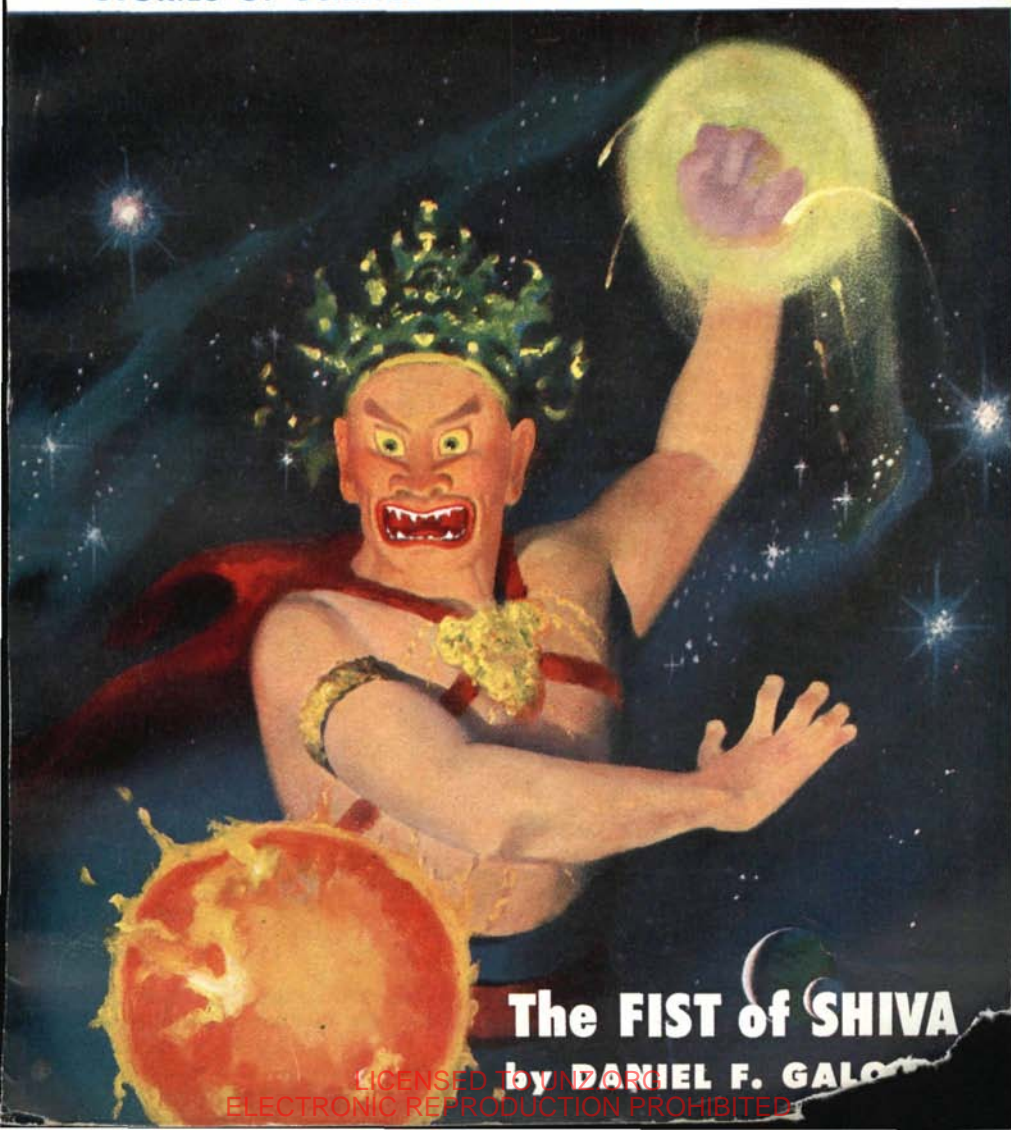
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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

MAY, 1953

35c



The FIST of SHIVA

by **DANIEL F. GALO**

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Chicago Science Fiction Convention Snapshots

Cover artist H. W. McCauley's candid shots of gala event: Upper left, Frances Hamling, *IMAGINATION*. Above, from left: Mari Wolf, *FANDORA'S BOX*; Howard Browne, *AMAZING STORIES*; Henry Bott, science writer; Carmel Galouye, beside husband, Daniel F. Galouye, popular s-f writer; Grace McCauley, wife of H. W.; Dwight V. Swain, prominent s-f author.



At Masquerade Ball, above left, three fans exhibit lavish costumes; center, famed writers L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley observe the festivities; right, Evelyn Gold of *GALAXY* tames unruly "monster."

IMAGINATION

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The Editorial

SCIENCE fiction must be scaring hell out of Russia these days. We have at hand a current copy of "News From Behind The Iron Curtain", published by the National Committee for a Free Europe. We'd like to quote a few excerpts of an article, *Methods of Writing Science Fiction and the Tasks of Science Fiction in General*, originally printed in a Warsaw publication last fall, written by a Stanislaw Lem.

Quoting: *Before he attempts any kind of science fiction, an author must first be acquainted with and later possess a large quantity of knowledge concerning contemporary problems, progressive tendencies, and the arts and sciences existing in the community. He must also acquire an ability to foresee future forms of development . . . In this respect, the author's knowledge of contemporary matters must equal the astronomer's knowledge of heavenly bodies . . .*

From the foregoing it is quite apparent our writers are guilty of playing us a snide trick. They wrote of atomic power, radar, television, rocketry, etc., long before any were fact. And all along without telling us they were authorities—not to mention being extraordinary seers making Nostradamus look like a quack . . . Sorry, Comrade, our writers, with few exceptions, are not authorities on

their subjects. They're from all walks of our *free* way of life, people with imagination and a yen to exercise it. They write for *enjoyment* and that great bugaboo, *money*—the fruit of ambition. A combination that causes you considerable dismay. Fools, aren't we?

COMRADE Lem goes on to outline the primary task of the science fiction writer: . . . *to create a hypothetical material basis for contemporary society which will indicate . . . its future forms of life, its occupations, ideas, thoughts, passions, conflicts, and thus provide a quasi-bridge to the future. In his attempt to create such a base, he will be helped by the newest most revolutionary achievements in scientific and technological fields, and, very important, by certain generalized teachings of the Marxist classics.*

Ever hear of free speech, Comrade? We have it, (a sad fact from your point of view) and our science fiction writers exercise it. They're not told *what* to write—as their duty—nor *how*, i.e., "by certain generalized teachings of the Marxist classics." If our writers have any task to perform it is one of *entertainment*, a silly, stupid facet of our Capitalistic Culture. Strange, isn't it, that a people who do *what* they want—*how* they want—*when* they want—

and for whatever purpose suits their individual fancy can have become the greatest nation on Earth? Sure you resent our method of science fiction; our writers are not controlled—they have what you'd sell your eye-teeth for, *free expression!*

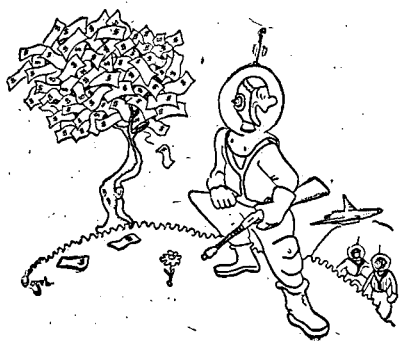
IN writing of the future, Lem instructs: *He may not—it would offend common-sense—populate the sun's surface with salamander-like creatures which feed on atomic fire . . . We must be fully aware of the fact that in the future classless society, many forms of conflict, as we know them today, will disappear . . . We may simply say that if our philosophy of life wins, there will be no hunger, war and defeat . . . Great care must be exercised by the author. The principles of historical materialism must be applied in such a way that the author will not fall into an easy and tempting "future schematism."*

Stalin's going to hate you, Comrade. Even though he told you what to say. Science fiction writers should not write of the impossible? Of course not, *that* might encourage *thinking*, and some ingenious individual might come up with a practical application. We're featuring a novel this month that's really impossible — the characters use telepathy and teleportation. Does this offend your common sense? We take it in our stride because nothing's impossible to our boys. Matter of fact, we *enjoy* (that naughty word again) the impossible. It gives us something to *think* about. Just another characteristic of Western progress, Com-

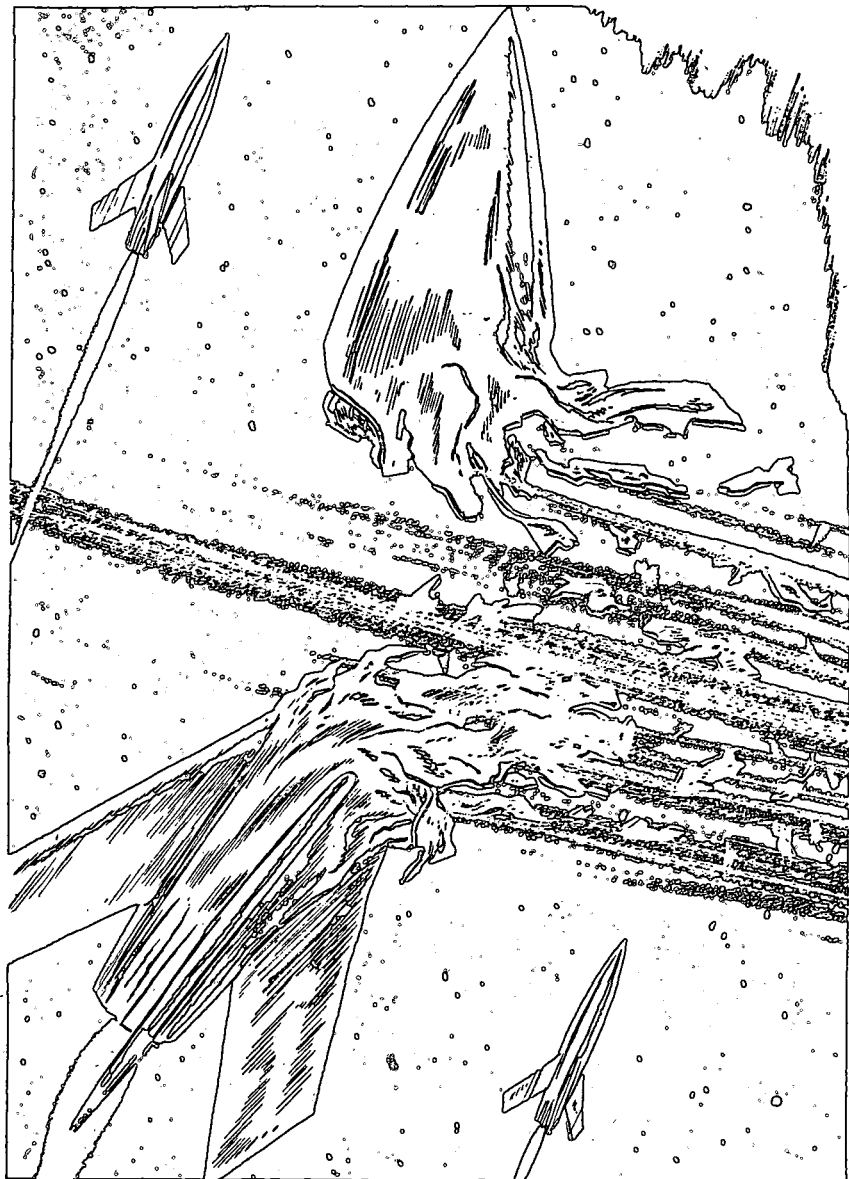
rade. We like being a stimulated people! . . . Yes, Stalin's going to hate you, because you dropped the Iron Curtain for a moment and showed *fear*. You said, "*if* our philosophy of life wins . . ." You mean your gang feels some doubt about it? Do our science fiction writers worry you with their nasty "future schematistic" stories? We have never given the matter a second thought, but then, we don't have your fears or doubts. Neither do we have to write with an MVD agent at our shoulder; we're not forced to *educate* the populace along one line of thinking. Our people think for themselves, and write about what *they* think. Unfair, isn't it?

Want the science fiction blueprint, Comrade? Start off with your desire to do it; add a dash of imagination—*your* idea; write it to suit yourself; send it to your favorite magazine; if it's entertaining enough, cash your check. It's a lot of fun.

You should try it sometime . . .
wlh



"Hey, Guys!"



THE FIST OF SHIVA

By
Daniel F. Galouye

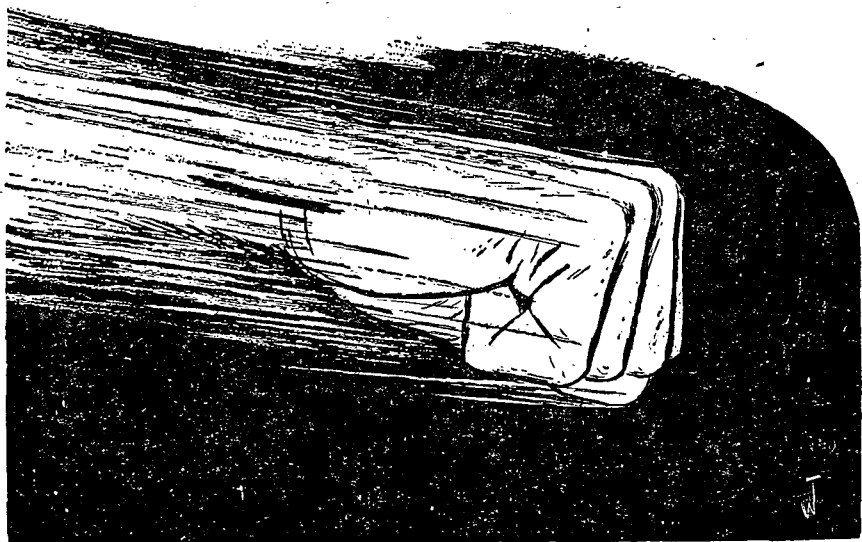
Playing God was a secret game the two boys enjoyed; but neither of them knew then that someday their power might destroy all of Earth . . .

CLARK Granet lay on his chest in the cool, soft grass and teased his captive ter-rapin with a bent twig. Spark, his brown fox terrier, pranced around the shelled creature, barking lustily.

The small turtle blinked its black

eyes and Clark imagined it regarded him thinking, "*Of course you're no god! How could a six-year-old be a god?*"

It was peaceful in the meadow behind his house and he had wanted to lie there all day watching redbirds in the thicket.



But the terrapin had come and with it, in the warmth of midday, had come a new interest. That had been half an hour ago. Now the creature blinked its eyes again and on straining legs, turned away. There was a loneliness in its eyes, Clark felt. A loneliness that begged release. Sighing, he let it go, watched the dog leap playfully after it.

Running footsteps jogged toward him and he turned to watch his brother approach.

"What'cha doing out here?" Russell demanded, plopping on the ground. A small furry creature, a pet flying squirrel, left its perch on his shoulder and scampered into his shirt pocket.

Clark snapped the twig between his hands. "Nothing."

"Let's play!" Excitement broke into the other's words.

"Down at the park? Ball?"

"Naw—let's play gods!"

Clark turned away disinterestedly. "I don't want to."

"Aw, come on! It's fun!"

"It is not! It's unfair! It's not right to watch other people."

"Sissy!"

"I ain't a sissy, either!"

"Then let's play gods."

Clark hesitated. "Just once . . . just for a little while."

Russell fell back on the grass and closed his eyes. With a sigh, Clark lay beside him.

Then the warmth of the field fell away like a heavy cloak. Up from the surface he rose—up like the gas-filled balloon he had lost at the county fair, like the smoke from the flaming ball of fire that had buried itself in the ground behind his home three years before.

Below he could "see" the lazy meadow (he laughed at the idea of seeing when he had no eyes with which to look.) He regarded his body and Russell's, lying relaxed as though in sleep.

It is fun, thought Clark.

"Of course it's fun!" came back Russell's unspoken answer.

"*This* is fun—not spying on people," Clark amended, wondering why it was his brother could hurl thoughts at him whenever he wanted to.

"You'll be able to send all your thoughts to me too, soon—when ever you want to. Just like you learn to do everything else I can."

Clark turned his attention to the scene flying by below. Suddenly he was frightened.

"I'm going back," he said fearfully.

"You're afraid! You *are* a sissy!"

Clark wasted no time in leisure flight. There was no sensation of movement or time passage. But abruptly he opened his eyes and sat up under the tree in the meadow.

"I still say you're a sissy," Russell taunted, rising.

"I think we ought to tell mama about . . ."

"She'll laugh at you, like she did before. Anyway, she won't even let you talk about it."

"But she'll believe if you tell her too, Russell!" He grasped his brother's arm. "You've got to tell her!"

Russell laughed and walked toward the house. "I don't want anybody to know."

"Well, I'm going to *make* her believe me! I'll show her. I'll . . ."

Russell stopped and turned to look at him. His eyes were mad and his fists were closed tight. He looked harder—*harder* . . .

"*Don't Russell!*" Clark shouted. His whole body felt like his hands had the time he spilled the nearly boiling water on them. "I won't tell anybody! Honest, I won't!"

* * *

ALL around Clark snowflakes whirled in their lithe dance toward the ground as they fought a chilling wind. But Clark was not cold. There was no sensation of temperature, he realized, as he thought of his warm body lying on the rug next to Russell in front of the fire.

Without moving, he hovered over the road, wondering whether he ac-

tually sensed his brother's unreal presence, or whether it was just his imagination.

Behind was his home. Ahead was the big house where Elaine Barrow and her family lived. He looked down and saw that the road, grooving through the curve of a hill, was completely covered by a recent snowslide.

Soon, he remembered, Elaine's father would be driving home from town with the latest Archaeological Journal for her grandfather. But now he'd have to wait for the snow plow.

Abruptly, he realized there *was* something he could do. He had watched Russell concentrate on a bush and had seen the leaves curl up and smoke and burst into flame.

Clark narrowed his vision until he could see only the pile of snow. Then he thought of heat—intense heat . . .

The white mound began to shrink. Water flowed away from it, down the road and into the gutter. Suddenly steam began rising from the pile!

But as he looked up he started. Like a wave washing up on a beach, a curling blanket of snow lapped over from the embankment along one side and flopped down upon the road.

Russell!

There was laughter—an amused

laughter that came from the other end of the three-hundred foot stretch of snow-covered road.

"Go home, Clark!" his brother's thoughts came. "I don't want you out here! I don't want an eight-year-old kid following me!"

"That was mean," Clark began a reprimand, backing away. "You . . ."

"I ought to be crazy like you and try to help people instead of hurt them?" Russell was advancing now, slowly. "Why should I help people?"

Clark could almost see the hazy, wavering space that his brother occupied. It was like looking into swirling clear air that was about to gather into a cloud.

"Do you know," Russell continued eagerly, "that while you were here melting snow I found out that if we wanted to we could even cause an—an *earthquake*?"

The almost-cloud, Clark imagined, seemed to be striving toward a definite form. He wondered if he "looked" the same way to his brother.

"It would be easy," Russell was near now. "Down there—below the surface—there are layers of rocks. Some of them are huge, heavy rocks . . ."

Clark wanted to streak back to the house and the room where his father and mother were reading before the fire. But he didn't want

his brother to think he was afraid—not too much.

"Why should we do anything like that, Russell?" he asked. "Don't you see . . ."

"Yeah. You're going to tell me again that we're different; that we ought to be doing good with the power . . . We're different, all right! We're different, like—like *gods*! *That's what we are Clark! We're gods!*"

Clark's thoughts were a protest. "But it's true!" Russell was avid. "I've read about gods—Greek gods and Roman gods and all the others. They went around showing people how powerful they were—killing them off. That's what we'll do someday, Clark—when we're strong enough. We'll let everybody know we're gods and they'll worship us!"

It wasn't true, Clark shouted, more to himself than to his brother. They *were* like other people—maybe just a little different. But the power would go away and they'd be just like everybody else—Russell like a ten-year-old boy and he like an eight-year-old. But again he wondered what made them different. Was it that someone or something more powerful . . .

"There's nothing more powerful than us!" Russell's angry thought broke in.

"But in Sunday school . . ."

"Are you a Sunday school sissy too?"

"God made us different," Clark said bravely. "He gave us the power—to do good."

Russell laughed again. Then Clark winced as something streaked from the hazy area that was his brother. Suddenly Clark felt pain—the pain of heat. It was the same kind of sensation he felt when Russell looked at him squint-eyed.

He turned and streaked back into the house.

* * *

FLAMES licked higher into the night sky. Heat from the fire was intense. And the bases of low clouds, reflecting the blaze, were tinted a dull white-red.

A deep grumbling welled near the front of the building. It grew into an enraged growl as the spire toppled and crashed into the roof. A six-foot wooden cross flew outward. Frightened shouts rose as the crowd surged away.

The cross crashed on the sidewalk and one of its arms snapped off. Clark grasped Elaine's hand and pulled her further back with him, to the rear of the ring of spectators.

"It's awful," she said, not looking away from the fire. "How do you suppose it started?"

Flickering reflections played against her face, etching her anx-

ety in tense shadows and highlights and suffusing her dark hair with a reddish tint.

A bespectacled teen-age girl grasped her shoulder. "They say there was an explosion—in the rear of the church." She pointed.

If only there had been something as simple as an explosion, a natural fire, Clark thought. Sickeningly, he remembered having sensed the ethereal presence of his brother a few minutes earlier while he and Elaine were at the drug store.

He looked to his left and suddenly saw Russell crossing the street. Releasing Elaine's hand, he followed while she continued watching the firemen.

Russell tossed away a cigarette, walked along the side of the school building and went across the athletic field behind it. Then he sat on the stoop at the side entrance to the school, his figure clearly illuminated by the yard light.

Clark approached silently, his fists clenched.

"Why did you do it?" he demanded.

Russell started, then smiled. His hand went up casually to his shoulder to stroke a small, gray thing that was perched there.

Clark looked closer. It was a flying squirrel.

"Recognize it?" Russell asked.

"Why did you burn the church?" Clark repeated insistently.

"Remember when I was a kid?" Russell stared absently toward the fire and the shadows on his face danced as the flames flared and diminished in intensity. "I used to have a squirrel as a pet—one exactly like this one."

Clark stepped forward.

"As a matter of fact," the other continued. "It *was* this squirrel . . . *this same animal!*"

Clark frowned puzzledly.

Russell held the thing up in the palm of his hand and pointed to its head. "Here are the two notches I cut in its ear for identification . . . Remember, Clark? The thing was old when I got it. I was five then. These animals have a life span of only a few years . . . And here, I find it thirteen years later—not much older in appearance than when I first captured it!"

HIS anger tempered by curiosity, Clark watched his brother put the animal on the step and place a pecan beside it.

"Watch," he urged.

The squirrel darted forward, elongated its body in a strained, cautious stretch and touched the nut with its nose. Then it backed away, staring at the object.

Abruptly a violent, visible aura of energy enveloped the nut. Clark gasped as he heard the snap of the shell.

"See!" Russell shouted trium-

phantly, rising, "The thing's like us! It has the power too!"

The animal darted forward again and held half the pecan between its front paws, began nibbling on it.

"Don't you see, Clark?" Russell caught his brother's shoulders in an eager grip. "I imparted some of my god-like powers to it while it was close to me—when I was young. And it has hardly aged at all! That means we'll live hundreds of years!—And you ask why I burned something as meaningless as a church. Of course I burned the church! What in hell is a church? Religion is stupid . . . the kind they have now. When I . . ."

Clark drove his fist into the other's face and he fell backward.

Hidden hate flared into Russell's expression and he jumped up. But he did not fight. Instead he stood rigid, glowering.

He was using the power . . . *the tremendous power!* Clark could feel the searing heat. Damp weeds around him flared into brief flames up to within a few inches of his feet. Suddenly the heat was visible to his special sense of perception and the air around him seemed to glow aura-like.

But there was no pain—only discomfort. The shield-like defensive power that protected him and his brother from each other was holding back the energy that Clark knew would have vaporized any

normal human—as it had nearly disintegrated the church.

Now Clark was hurling back his own destructive force. Now he watched Russell grimace as the invisible energy sphere enveloped him.

But a new expression of determination pushed away the frustration in Russell's features.

"I'll kill you!" he shouted in desperation. "I thought some day you'd see what we really are! That it was meant for us to rule—to have all the wealth and power in the world!"

In an intense exertion, Clark hurled even more concentrated energy at his brother. There was a flicker of additional discomfort on his face.

"You're too damned pious!" Russell's harangue continued. "You can't see that we're *really* gods! But I'm going to be a god Clark! No matter how hard you try to stop . . ."

Clark stepped forward and hurled his fist into his brother's face again, realizing their destructive energies were stalemated, powerless against the counterforce that protected each.

As Russell's head snapped back, the mental barrage stopped. Then Clark hit him again. He collapsed. When he rose finally, Clark swung a wide blow to his jaw. He lay still on the charred ground.

Wracked with indecision, Clark stood over him. He could kill him now! He could choke the life out of his brother, who would be content with nothing less than godhood.

Shaking his head hopelessly, he knelt over Russell's form and seized his throat in his fingers. Then he tightened the grip. But the skin beneath his fingers would not give! As though it were a thin layer that hid a body of marble, it resisted his pressure!

Too late! He had long recognized the parallel development of a special shield that protected them from each other's physical force—just as the mysterious aura negated their physical attacks. And now the physical shield was invulnerable — unless it was not too late for a more violent onslaught to succeed. He looked for a brick.

"Clark! Clark! What happened?"

He rose and turned around. Elaine was running toward him.

CHAPTER II

THE crunch of gravel under rubber was a pleasant monotony as Clark drove Elaine home in his father's car after the graduation dance. The countryside was a fairyland of shadows and pale highlights — a monochrome of

moonlight.

Elaine sat close and as she hummed, her animated vivacity seemed to spill over into him and dispel his thoughts of Russell. His mind had inescapably dwelled on his brother, remembering it had been only a few days after another graduation two years ago that Russell had left home. That had been the day after the church burned down.

But resolutely, he dismissed the unpleasant thoughts and soon was humming with her.

They reached her house and he pulled the car up in front of the gate. With uneasy hesitation he looked at her a moment, then he kissed her.

And the soft, warm breeze that blew in through the window and ruffled her hair against his face seemed to sweep his discouraging thoughts further into hidden recesses.

For a moment, Russell had never existed. There had never been a brother two years older than himself who had wanted to be a god and had disappeared when he found he wouldn't be allowed to be one.

"You're going to accept the scholarship, Clark?" Elaine asked.

He didn't take his arm from her shoulder. "I don't know." There was indecision in his voice. "That would mean another four

years of studying and . . ."

"But four years isn't so long," she objected.

"A lot can happen in four years. People you know can get married, for one thing."

"Some might," she admitted. Then, coyly, "But—but I don't think a girl ought to get married before she's twenty-one, do you?"

He pinched himself mentally. There was no use acting out the impossible dream any longer . . . He was different, he reminded himself. And so was Russell—and the squirrel his brother had shown him. And the squirrel had lived its life span four or five times over. Would he be alive two hundred years after Elaine died?

Suddenly he jerked upright, a tremor of apprehension running through him.

"What's wrong?" Elaine asked.

But the question made no impression.

He had sensed the psychic nearness of his brother!

With an impatience he could not conceal, he went with Elaine up the walk. Then, leaving her frowning at his behavior, he turned and strode nervously back to the car, the hypersensory impressions becoming even stronger.

IN the automobile he watched Elaine go into the house. Then he lay back against the seat and

closed his eyes.

Abruptly the sensation of material existence shrank away and his ethereal alter ego streaked toward his home. Then he saw Russell—not the material Russell, but the insubstantial essence, cloud-like, swirling, ominous hovering over the house.

Suddenly he knew Russell had detected his approach. A lance of energy enveloped Clark with the intensity of a blast furnace.

Almost senselessly, he realized that here was power—terrible power! Energy that might pierce the natural aura of protection surrounding his psychic form . . . perhaps even the intangible shield that cloaked his physical body!

He darted aside, escaping the deadly attack. Then he swung around in a circle to elude another blast.

The second blast missed. But beyond him it hit something solid. There was a fierce flash of combusive energy and he turned in time to see the blazing disintegration of his home, down to its foundation! For a moment he thought of his parents, asleep in the north bedroom . . .

Then suddenly another scorching blast swept over him. He tried to rush away but the focal point of lethal emanations followed. Suddenly, with a burst of speed, he was clear once more.

Then he lunged away, outward, up from the ground, wondering with horror whether a psyche, if that's what he was, could be obliterated by the tremendous power. What would happen should his superconscious be destroyed? Would his body continue to exist? He knew it would, but only in death.

In fleeing, he hurled a lance of destructive energy at his brother. It halted his pursuit, but only momentarily.

Another bolt of force swept over Clark and he shouted his agony in a tormented convulsion that must have jarred the entire substructure of nature.

Fighting off onrushing oblivion, he streaked away—away from the earth! Below hung the huge half-light, half-dark world. To his left blazed the solar sphere. Between the two orbs' was another globe split down its center by a line separating dark from light. Only now did he realize the incredible speed of which psychic transition was capable.

The sun, as he rushed outward, became a tiny pinpoint of light that lost itself in the background of galactic stars. Then a myriad stars that seemed to form a collective group with the sun melted into a faint haze in which none of them was distinguishable.

Ahead were more stars. But even as he neared them he knew some-

thing was wrong. They did not grow in apparent size as he approached! Either 'they had shrunk or the indefinable area which represented the space occupied by his psyche had enlarged! Had flight at terrific speed resulted in increased mass? But how could it when there was no mass associated with his non-physical form?

Another bolt was loosed and a star ahead and to the left exploded in a dazzling convulsion of pulsating light in which the disk seemed to grow a thousand times larger than its original size and brighter than its initial brilliancy.

He streaked past the entire aggregation of stars and nebulae in what seemed less than a second. The pain of the last hateful blast persisted, but it seemed insignificant in comparison with the terror that was beginning to grow within him.

The entire galaxy now seemed to be a Lilliputian thing and he seemed to be a monstrous entity streaking through its length, stirring celestial bodies and rifts of star dust in his wake. It was almost like he and Russell *were* . . .

"Of course we're gods!" Russell's thought carried through to him with a new enthusiasm, as though he had that instant experienced a realization that overshadowed the purpose of the chase.

Russell was no longer drawing

closer. He was faltering in pursuit. "We are gods and our domain is the entire cosmosphere! Our earthbound existence has been but a constricted distortion in miniature of our actual size—our real omnipotence."

CLARK turned and thrashed out with a lance of might. But Russell did not strike back. And, even as the hazy, insubstantial area that represented the other's psyche turned and moved off in a new direction, Clark was aware of his thoughts:

"This is my true domain!" There was an irrational emotionlessness in Russell's self-directed observations. "I do not belong to the infinitesimal world of green hills and blue waters that revolves around a weak, insignificant star. Not even the galaxy! The entire universe is my domain!"

The thoughts trailed off into nothingness and Russell was gone.

Stunned, Clark hung motionless in the frightening, still, cold and luminous void. Now an overpowering fear engulfed him as he surveyed the spots of light around him. The fear grew to terror as he remembered the apparent tremendous increase in immaterial size of his psyche. Why did it seem that he was now larger than an entire star system? What incomprehensible effect of psychic

existence was responsible for the phenomenon?

He drove the maddening questions from his mind and turned to streak homeward.

But frenzy exploded within him with a stabbing force and he froze again, dumfounded.

Ahead and all around him were thousands of stars—single stars, clusters of them—blotches of nebulous material, streamers of luminous vapor that had either once been suns or were evolving into suns.

And each star cluster seemed alike! Each appeared to beckon him with a maddening allurements, mocking, "Here, Clark, this way is home."

He was lost! He was hopelessly lost!

Tortured with desperation, he raced from cluster to cluster—searching, hoping that one of them would possess some familiar feature.

But there was none!

Stricken with a new form of exhaustion, he hung motionless once more, afraid to move, afraid to remain still, vowing that if he ever found earth again he would never leave it.

But he was not motionless! He was conscious of movement—movement toward a brilliant cluster in the distance. Suddenly, as he gained terrific momentum, he un-

derstood the movement . . . his detached superconscious was being drawn back to his physical form in response to the natural attraction that existed between the two entities.

He added his own thrust to the ever increasing attraction and surged forward in a furious display of speed. And, as he approached, the celestial bodies about him expanded at a frightening rate—expanded toward their natural sizes.

He streaked into the cluster and was drawn toward one of the pinpoints of light. Reacting to an intensifying pang of apprehension, he realized now that his brother had grown stronger than him purposefully; Russell had used the two years of his absence to develop his power to the fullest. Clark, on the other hand, had tried to ignore his power, had even tried to forget that he was different from other persons—except for the two months during which he had startled himself with the gradual discovery of a power of teleportation.

But now he could no longer ignore the weird capabilities. In the interest of self defense he must seek to develop them to their ultimate.

CHAPTER III

THE wingless nuclojet speared southward on a secondary

route in the early morning sky. .

Brad Darson settled comfortably in the passenger seat and withdrew his absent gaze from the glistening, damp surface below. He turned up the heat, tore off the printed sheet that protruded from the craft's press circuit recorder, and spread the page across his knees.

He had seen the edition an hour earlier, before leaving on the flight, but again the bold type caught his attention:

SHIVA CULT PREDICTS COMET

He started to read the story for the second time, but the driver cast a sidewise glance at the paper, punched the auto control button on the panel and relaxed.

"What do you think about it, chief?" he asked.

Brad looked questioningly at him.

"That Shiva stuff," he explained. "The comet."

"Must be something to it," Brad shrugged. "A lot of people belong to the cult these days."

"Too damned many . . . Doesn't seem possible that millions of people would belong to a world-wide cult that worships a God of Destruction—not in the latter part of the Twenty-First Century, anyway."

"But, Les," Brad corrected with a laugh. "Don't forget—he's sup-

posed to be a living god! That might make a difference."

"He's a crackpot," Les said sarcastically.

"I think he's a smooth operator."

Les frowned.

"You've got to admit he's got plenty of brains . . . How would you react if a guy gets up and says a comet is coming into the solar system—a comet that can't be detected by any scientific means because it's too far away? You scoff at first. Then a couple of weeks go by and suddenly the most powerful telescope verifies the prediction. . . . Now you don't think he's so much of a crackpot. You begin to wonder whether there might not be something to the fellow after all."

"I'd still think he's not all there in the upper levels."

"Perhaps so. But then there's another prediction. And another . . . Eventually there's a point at which you stop being skeptical. If the Holy Man from one of his temples should show up and stick his palm out at the same time, you might be moved to kick in a few hundred toward the cause of the living god. Mightn't you?"

"Look, Brad. I'm your research director. I'm supposed to have a scientific mind. I don't go in for . . ."

"But let's say he's performed

enough miracles to convince you."

Les scratched his head. "Maybe," he admitted. "If I've reached the point where I've stopped being skeptical."

"Apparently millions all over the world have already reached that point."

"But the comet—what about that thing?"

BRAD closed his eyes and let his head fall back upon the cushioned rest. For a long moment he was motionless. Even his breathing was imperceptible.

"About the comet," Les repeated. "Do you think that prediction will come true?"

Still Brad didn't move.

"Chief!" The driver touched his shoulder, frowning.

"Oh, the comet," Brad snapped upright and looked at him. He smiled. "I rather imagine the comet will be there—precisely where Shiva predicted."

Les laughed brusquely. "You're not ready to kick in with a contribution, are you?"

"Hardly. We're dealing in science—not superstition."

"But you say the miracles that guy performs are *not* supernatural."

"They're not. They can be explained scientifically, I'm sure. I'm equally sure they can be performed by anyone—with the proper conditioning or treatment."

Les' face was distorted between expressions of half amusement, half indecision. "Imagine me proving I can be in two places a thousand miles apart at the same time."

Again there was a silence that was broken only by the wind swishing along the side of the craft.

Brad returned his gaze outside. More vehicles were in the air lane now. He looked past them at the surface. Features there—roads, hills, streams—were attempting to be pleasantly familiar. But he harshly pushed aside their friendly encroachment on his sentiments, staring at them with cold, impersonal eyes.

It had all been too long ago for any impression to survive until the present.

Les interrupted his thoughts. "If you think this guy's miracles can be performed by anyone as the effects of a new science, why don't you dedicate a project to that end?"

"Perhaps we already have."

The driver started. "You mean this 'rock' we're pulling out of the ground has something to do with it?"

Absently, Brad nodded. A faintly etched memory image shown dimly in his mind—an impression of two small boys. It was late afternoon and they were lost—lost in a wooded area near their home. They were frighten-

ed and were running. Suddenly a fierce, flaming object flared in the sky overhead. It stayed there only a split second. The earth shook as it landed and buried itself deep in the ground only a few hundred yards away. The heat blast was terrific. A little furry thing that cringed in a pocket of one of the boys made a frightened noise. Faces and hands burned as though from the effects of long exposure to summer sunlight, the boys turned and raced away, leaving the area of felled and twisted and charred trees behind. The incident was their secret, for no one must know they had been silly enough to lose themselves . . .

THE craft settled lightly to the ground and coasted to a stop near a steel derrick. Taut, heavy chains stretched downward from the top of the structure and disappeared into the ground. An engine at the base of the derrick puffed restlessly, its clutch ready to grip the winch that would raise the chains.

Two men came out of a temporary shack beside a truck and advanced toward the nuclojet.

Les cut the silent engine and leaped out. "Who's going to be in charge of this new project?" he asked eagerly.

"I am," Brad climbed out beside him.

"Hell, chief, you're already personally directing the space flight section. How can you do both at the same time?"

"You'll take it over. It's almost finished."

They walked toward the two men.

"Will I transfer to the Space Station?"

"No. Everything's in hand up there. You can do it from the ground. You'll stay in the same lab group so we can stick close together until we send the first manned craft out on an interstellar jaunt."

"Interstellar!"

Brad nodded casually.

"Hell," Les hissed. "I ought to get used to these surprises. I ought to know by now you're not a genius . . . you're a superman!"

They stopped to meet the men from the shack.

"She's ready to come up now, Mr. Darson," one of them said, nodding toward the derrick.

"Okay, Jim," Brad walked in that direction. "Haul it away."

The second man went back to the engine and manipulated a lever while Brad and Les stood at the side of the hole. The engine groaned under the weight of the mass that was now suspended at the end of its linkage.

A shaft that needed oil whined gratingly. Chains clanked as their

links fell against the drum of the slowly rotating winch. The engine's staccato thumping became louder as Jim speeded it up.

But Brad was oblivious of the noise as he watched the chains struggle out of the hole. There was a vague emptiness surrounding him, it seemed; and he tried to define the sensation. It was as though he were standing in the center aisle of a deserted cathedral at midnight.

Was it that the very site he was on was *different*? Was it, in its own special way, hallow like a church, or a cemetery? He glanced at the matting of grass at his feet. Was it possible that he was standing on shoots of vegetation which had existed, not since the last winter, but for over a hundred and fifty years—especially strengthened by an indescribable power to withstand the changes of season? Were the trees that surrounded the clearing the same ones that existed when he was last here?

A dark object appeared at the mouth of the hole and he stiffened, his mind relinquishing the vague thoughts.

Jim threw out the clutch. The object hung at the end of the four chains, swaying almost imperceptibly. Brad reached out with a trembling hand and touched it.

Larger than a barrel it was. And black — encrusted with dirt and

small bits of fused material—pitted with holes and nicks of varying sizes.

It was coarse, hard, to his fingers. Instinctively, he withdrew his hand. Then he laughed inwardly at his reluctance.

This was it! This was the object that had lain hidden in the back of his memory for over a hundred years.

“THE rock!” Les exclaimed. “There it is.” Jim shifted the engine’s linkage to another chain that became taut and drew the object out from under the derrick and over the body of the truck.

Brad sighed, relieved. “Get it to Laboratory D with that regular shipment. You know how to handle it and where to unload the thing. . . . And, remember, I’m trusting to the loyalty of you two. We’re the only ones who know the details of this operation. I”

But he had spied a sledge hammer leaning against the shack. He swept it into his hands and aimed an overhead blow at an irregular protuberance on the metallic mass. A chunk flew off. He retrieved it, inspected it and slipped it into his coat pocket.

Jim and his assistant were busy securing the mass on the truck when Brad turned and headed back for the nuclojet. Les followed.

"All right, chief," Les urged. "Let's have the story: You said there'd be an explanation when you got the thing."

"It might not be a pleasant story yet." There was a half-smile on Brad's face. "Let's wait and see how the tests work out."

"But what kind of tests . . ."

Brad had stopped and was staring toward the edge of the clearing. There was a movement in the tall weeds. A weak but excited whimpering became audible as motion in the vegetation traced the slow approach of the thing. It stopped for a moment and the head of a dog appeared above the weeds.

The animal came forward slowly and lay on the ground in front of Brad, still whimpering.

Les whistled. "Damned if that isn't the oldest dog I've ever seen! Seems to be a hermit—out here in the woods all by itself."

Brad reached down and touched its head, bare-skinned in many spots that hair had once covered. It was easy to see that the animal was blind—or almost blind. Where teeth had once grown in the strong, jutting fox terrier jaw were now only eroded, stained crags.

"It seems to know you, Brad," Les observed. "Ever been around here before?"

A dry tongue came out of the animal's mouth and rubbed harshly over Brad's hand.

"Spark!" he whispered incredulously.

The dog made a feeble effort at wagging its tail, sounded a final whine and lay still.

Hardly breathing, Brad stared at the creature, reeling under a mixture of emotions. His mental processes suddenly released an almost forgotten memory.

AGAIN he envisioned the two boys running under the flaming object, a squirrel balled up in the pocket of one of them. Only, now the mental picture showed another feature. Running in close pursuit behind the children was a small fox terrier.

Les was shaking his head. "If ever an animal earned death, that one did. He looks like he's lived twice the age of an average dog. I'll bet he's at least twenty-five years old!"

"At least," Brad agreed.

Les touched his shoulder. "The communisignal." He was pointing to the red light on top of the nullojet.

"Have Jim bury this animal before he leaves." Brad strode off toward the craft.

"What!" Les frowned after him. But Brad had already opened the door of the vehicle and had activated the communication apparatus.

"Darson speaking."

"Lab D, sir," a feminine voice said. "One moment. We have a direct from the Station."

He waited.

"Chief?" a strained voice inquired excitedly.

"Trouble?"

"The X19-A's missing!"

"Where?"

"Don't know. Its video system went out four hours ago. We thought we could effect remote adjustments, so we continued with the flight. Now there's no-control linkage at all through hyper."

"What was your last fix?"

"It was direct for Centauri, three-point-four out, when we lost video. But we estimate it changed heading at least five times before the complete blowout came."

"Then there's hope of picking it up?"

"No, sir . . . I suppose that'll retard the schedule for the first manned flight?"

"I don't know, Henry." The frown on Brad's face was deeply etched. "Hell, I can't see how that could happen. The control system was foolproof! Unless . . ."

The voice was sympathetically silent. Brad listlessly snapped off the switch. He closed his eyes . . .

Suddenly he could see it! Space — cold, black, unfriendly, star-specked nothingness. A frightening void. So big. So empty. So awful . . . Three-point-four out.

But so much nothing to look through . . . Then he had it—bits of metal, shards of glass, wires, fused plates. A funnel antenna here. One of the tubes over there . . . The flight of the X 19-A had ended in an explosion. But there wasn't anything aboard that could explode!

* * *

AN excited man who called himself a god paced the marble floor in the spacious office of a temple hidden in the mountains north of Los Angeles. The temple's marvelous architecture and giant carved statues were unmatched anywhere in the world. The man was clad in brilliantly hued sequined robes that swished as he walked.

A metallic purr sounded from the broad, glass-top desk and he raced over to flick a switch.

"Shiva," he said.

"Green reporting."

"How'd it go?"

"It's taken care of."

"Was there . . . *You're not calling unguarded, are you?*"

"Of course not. I'm on a counter-pulse circuit."

"Where?"

"Lab D."

"Any trouble?"

"No, sir."

The man who called himself

Shiva smiled broadly. "Tell me about it."

"Two days, eighteen hours out and they lost their picture. The rest came off as scheduled . . . Red must have gotten his instructions straight again. Hell, chief, everybody around here acted as though the laboratory itself had blown up . . . How come you know so much about sabotaging the second-stage drive?"

"Divine cognition," he straightened proudly and arranged his robes, "can hardly . . ."

"You can wrap up all that hokus talk with me, chief," the transmitted voice sounded amused. "I'm the skeptical kind. But I know the right layout when I see it. That's why I'm with you—not because I've been fooled into thinking you're Supergod. You just know some spécial tricks, that's all."

A flash of rage swept across Shiva's face, but he did not allow it expression in his voice.

The office door opened and a short, stout man in a gray suit entered, brief case under his arm. "Sent for me?" he asked.

Shiva spoke into the communicator, "Stand by; Green . . . Yes, Wellman," he turned. "Sit down."

The visitor took a chair at the side of the desk. "What's the job this time?"

"How are our connections in fed-

eral circuits here—in Europe?"

"The worth of an—uh, connection," Wellman smiled craftily, "is a relative matter. Its relativity is determined by—might we say, cash?"

"Cash is a resource I find unlimited."

"What do you want done?"

"The Trans-At Company has held the franchise for U.S.-Europe service for ten years. There are two other corporations that are after it. A week ago we gained control of one of them. You handled the matter. You know which one."

"You want the franchise busted?"

"Busted and re-issued—in the right direction, of course . . . Can it be done?"

WELLMAN pouted for a moment, then smiled. "It's hard to operate that type of service without violating some of the terms of the franchise. Both governments realize that. I suppose we can dig up an accidental infraction and convince one of the governments it shouldn't have been overlooked—provided . . ."

"You'll have whatever money it will take."

"One question: Why are we getting into the strato-rocket business?"

"I'm quite sure that doesn't concern you." Shiva's smile was

impersonal, unflinching.

Wellman picked up his briefcase and walked slowly toward the door.

The robed man returned to the communicator.

"Green," he called.

"Yes."

"What's the significance of the 'rock' project? What is the 'rock'?"

"That's Orange's assignment."

"Aren't you two cooperating?"

"Yes. But I think you have an incompetent agent there. Orange isn't getting anywhere."

"Take over then. Or, at least help out and . . . Oh, Wellman," Shiva called out in the direction of the closing door.

The stout man stuck his head back in the office.

"You making any headway with that injunction?"

"A little. We expect to reach the right person tomorrow."

"Get them to make it stiff. Within a month I don't want a single shuttle craft hopping between here and the Space Station."

"That shouldn't be too hard. You got them chased out of one state already."

"Well make damned sure they get booted from another."

"They'll just go to a third."

"Find out which one and get to work on the attorney general there even before they set up operations."

"It'd be easier if we go after congressional legislation against the flights."

"Then put out feelers in that direction too. I'll give you a list of legislators who are Shivaite."

"My curiosity would be satisfied if I knew the purpose of this relentless attack," Wellman suggested.

Shiva smiled. "Let's just say it's an extension of the old struggle — science versus religion. Perhaps it's my opinion there's too much interest in Darson's personalized space conquest program — too little in the basic value of life, religion."

"You through with me, chief?" the voice in the communicator asked.

"Yes. Build a fire under Orange. Let's get some results on this 'rock' thing."

* * *

CAROL Sanders stood nervously before the window in the large office of Laboratory D. She ran a hand over her blonde hair, rearranging disheveled strands.

The door opened and she whirled around.

"Hi," greeted Ray Hartley. "You filing too?" He was a small man with thick glasses and he wore a laboratory apron. Still smiling, he crossed to the bank of

files at the other end of the room and slapped a stack of papers on top of one of the metal cabinets.

"I've finished," she said, crossing over to the desk. "Waiting for Brad."

"What's he got you on now?" Ray began dealing the papers into the drawers.

She laughed. "I've become the keeper of the mice. Ever try giving daily physicals to a hundred scurrying animals?"

"What's he keeping so many for? He only uses one on each test run beyond the Station. I understand there'll only be about three or four more unmanned flights."

"He's got something else in mind for the animals, I guess." She elevated herself onto the desk and crossed her legs, arranging the hem of her skirt. "Won't say what it is yet."

"Well," Ray closed the files and crossed to the door, "I hope you wrap it up in a hurry. We could use you back in bioclimatology. But I've got a hunch your next move is going to be closer to this office, rather than farther away." He looked down at her calves jokingly and whistled a shrill note that slurred off into one of lower-pitch.

"You aren't trying to infer," she asked laughingly, "that Master Brains may have a less scholarly side?"

"If he has you could find it, even without trying. . . See you."

She was alone in the room again.

With a sense of growing impatience, she walked around the desk and sat in the swivel chair. Her hand went out to a stack of papers in a bin as she eyed the door apprehensively.

Then she dropped her gaze to the miscellaneous letters, notes and memoranda. The top sheet drew a gasp from her lips.

It was a rough, penciled map marked off in a series of air routes. One end of the continuous, zig-zag line touched what represented Laboratory D's landing area. The other end, three hundred miles away, was the cause of her excited concern. It's terminus was near a small city. The line ended at a spot marked with a small dot. Written below the dot was the notation, "depth, 70 ft."

Biting her lips, she stood up and drummed her fingers on the desk thoughtfully.

The door swung open and Brad Darson strode in.

"Carol," he seemed surprised. "How's the menagerie today?"

"Healthy, happy and hungry," she quipped.

"I'll need the best specimen late this afternoon. Keep him hungry until then. . . Find me a cat with a voracious appetite too." He

reached into his pocket and withdrew the stained lump of metal, set it on top of the notes on his desk.

"A cat!" Carol exclaimed. But then she saw the bit of metal. "Is this the 'rock'?"

She picked it up and inspected it. "It certainly looks like it's been seventy feet underground."

He registered surprise, then anger. "How did . . . ?"

"Now Brad," she protested lightly, "you're not pretending the project is secret any longer—not when you leave notes like this lying around." She thumped a polished nail on the penciled map.

His jaw tightened and he shook his head self-reprimandingly as he folded the map and put it in his pocket.

"Still secret?" Carol asked solicitously.

He nodded. "It has to be . . . top secret."

"That's bad. I can name at least eight persons who were in here while I was waiting for you."

"Give me a list of them—in the interest of security."

"What about those who came in to file before I was here?"

"O'Connor will remember them."

"Your secretary took the morning off. He just came back about ten minutes ago."

"Brad," she asked hesitatingly, "what makes the project so se-

cret—so important?"

He grasped her shoulders. "When I'm ready to tell, Carol, you'll be the first to know. I promise that."

CHAPTER IV

BRAD double-bolted the heavy metal door and snapped on the recess lighting system of the small laboratory room. Crossing to the single bench against the opposite wall, he carried two cages that swung as he walked.

He placed the first on the bench. A frightened mouse scurried across its floor and squeezed itself into a corner, its fur sticking out between the bars like bristles.

Brad took the coop with the cat to the opposite end of the room where he opened a thick metal door. It was a closet. He put the cage on the floor and closed the door. The animal mewed pitifully, the muffled sound coming through the crack underneath the heavy panel. Brad opened the door a bit.

Back at the bench he moved the mouse's cage to one side and tightened the jaws of a caliper-like vice. Its fingers bit solidly into opposite sides of the clump of fused metal he had removed from the "rock".

Protruding from the surface of the bench immediately below the clump was a pencil-shaped metal

pipe, a pinpoint hole in its tip. It lacked only two inches of touching the small mass.

Brad pressed a button and the orifice in the pipe hissed violently as gas under pressure rushed to escape. He activated another circuit and the knife-like, invisible stream burst into vigorous flame.

He regulated the tongue until it bathed the irregular metal lump with its vision-prohibiting purple fire. Then he placed the cage as close to the flame as he could without endangering the mouse.

He backed away and waited—a minute, two minutes, five minutes.

Finally the purple hue of the flame faded in the vicinity of the metallic specimen. It became red, a more brilliant red. Now it was a faint white. A stronger white. A brilliant white.

Abruptly, he extinguished the jet flame. But the lump, heated to incandescence, continued to glow. He placed his hand close to it; withdrew it in an instinctive jerk. It was even hotter than he had expected.

Brad's breathing was rapid and his throat was dry as he pushed the cage closer. His eyes were alive with a fire that matched the glow of the white-hot substance even as they reflected it.

The mouse cringed in the far corner of its enclosure. And once

more Brad shoved the coop closer, until it almost touched the glowing mass.

Slowly, the incandescence faded and the lump was a soft red in hue. Five minutes later it was its original dull gray color.

He removed the cage to the other end of the bench. The heat gone, the almost domesticated mouse began to act normal once more, scampering across the floor of its enclosure and touching its nose to the bars.

Brad removed a cellophane-covered piece of cheese from his pocket, tore loose the wrapping and placed it on the bench a few inches from the cage.

There was perspiration on his face and his hands shook as he held up the food to attract the animal's attention. He let it drop back onto the bench.

The mouse caught the scent and raced over, tried to force its snout between the bars.

BREATHLESSLY, Brad waited, watching the famished animal scurry back and forth along the bars, emitting an intermittent high-pitched note of distress.

Three minutes passed and Brad's expression of tense expectancy began to disappear. It was replaced by disappointment.

"The power!" he banged his fist in frustration on the bench. "Use



the power!"

A cry shriller than usual was sounded by the mouse. But otherwise its behavior did not change.

"You work by *instinct!*" His tone was pleading as he gripped the edge of the bench and stared into the cage. "You've got to be able to use it right away! You don't have to learn it gradually. You don't have to stop and figure it out step by step, like I did!"

Impulsively, he darted from the bench and retrieved the cage with the cat. He opened it and withdrew the animal, placing it on the bench beside the first coop.

The cat tensed and sprang at the enclosed mouse. Its paws stretched wide, bared nails gripping the metal uprights, the animal worked

its way erratically, frenziedly around the cage.

Scurrying across the floor, the mouse managed to keep on the opposite perimeter of the enclosure.

"Protect yourself, damn you!" Brad shouted at the smaller creature. "Fight back! You can kill a hundred like him, without even touching them!"

But the cat continued to scamp around the cage and the mouse showed no deviation from its pattern of confined flight.

Ten minutes later Brad's shoulders sagged. Stricken with final and utter despondency, he forced the cheese through the bars and put the cat back in its container.

With a cage in each hand, he stepped outside.

Ray Hartley was waiting beside the door.

"How'd it go?" he asked.

Brad shook his head sullenly.

"Carol asked me to stand by for the specimens. I needed a couple of her pets for a bioclimatology experiment; she went to select them . . . Any special treatment for these two?" Ray nodded toward the cat and mouse.

Brad handed them to him. "Nothing special," he said numbly. "When that piece of hot metal on the bench in there cools off send it to metallurgy. Have them see what it is."

BRAD'S hand was still trembling as he poured another drink from the half-filled, dark-colored bottle and set it back down on his desk.

He downed it in a gulp and wiped perspiration from his forehead.

The door opened and Les entered, half sat on the desk top. "I just got the word that—whatever it was supposed to be—didn't go too well . . . Anything I can do?"—

"Yeah," Brad slurred. "You can take a drink and tell O'Connor to scare up another bottle." He poured another and tossed it down.

"It wasn't that rough, was it, chief?—The experiment, I mean."

His eyes, as he stared momentarily at Les, carried all the sarcasm

he could have put in words. He shoved a glass across the desk, filled it, and refilled his own.

"Damn!" Les exclaimed. "You're drinking like a sot who hasn't tasted the stuff in twenty years."

Brad laughed. "Or a hundred and twenty years."

Les walked around the desk and grasped his shoulder. "Whatever it was, chief, it isn't hopeless, is it?"

"Afraid so. You see . . ."

Part of the liquor came back up in his throat. He wasn't used to it. Pausing, he mopped his brow with a handkerchief and stood up. He swayed, reached out and grabbed the edge of the desk and sat down again.

"Well, let's just say the hell with it, Brad. Dammit, man—you've got enough stuff working now. What's one more project? After all, isn't space conquest—starting off with a bang with interstellar flights—enough for any one man in history?"

Brad laughed sarcastically.

"You mean," Les asked unbelievably, "that even the space deal was secondary to this new thing?"

"The space deal . . . was going to be only a means of, let's say, draining off the by-product of this new thing." Brad was having trouble making his loose tongue perform.

Les frowned, waiting for more.

"Hell," Brad rose, steadying himself and loosened his collar. "I was going to make every man a genius—a, a superman. But first I was going to give them the galaxy so there would be a star for everybody who wanted one. Then, when everybody had his own private sun and his eight or nine planets and all the wealth that the whole of humanity owns now, then I was going to make them . . ."

He gagged, but managed to hold it down. Erratically, he reached for the bottle, but missed, knocking it over. Les righted it; helped Brad back into his chair.

Les' frown changed to an amused smile. "Sure, chief," he pampered. "You were going to make everybody a god—just like Shiva."

"Just like Shiva," Brad repeated. The words slurred into one another. "Just like Shiva and . . ." he hesitated. "O'Connor!" The last word roared from his throat, directed at the door.

Les laughed: "Like Shiva and O'Connor, then."

The secretary looked into the room. His slim form stiffened in surprise as he readjusted his eyeglasses.

"Find a couple more bottles of this stuff," Brad ordered.

The corners of the secretary's mouth sagged downward disdainfully as he backed from the room.

"Brad," Les began hesitatingly,

"why don't you forget about work for a few days? You've been at it too long and too hard. Wise up. Look around you. You might find something interesting . . . Carol Sanders, for instance."

Brad jerked upright. The name had a sobering effect.

"You couldn't find a more worthy woman in the whole damned world," Les continued. "Nor a prettier one. They don't come any better."

Brad hiccupped. "You trying to sell me something?"

"No. I'm trying to help you see the grass under your feet. Why don't you take a few evenings off? Get out and do some of the things other young people do? Try dancing for a change—maybe a few shows. She could use the new routine too. You've been working her pretty damned hard lately."

FOR a moment Brad was even a bit more sober as he stared intensely at the paper weight on his desk. Even through the haze of alcohol-clouded thoughts, he could picture Carol clearly—in a laboratory uniform, in a colorful frock, in a business suit. Her dress made no difference. She was beautiful in any attire . . . Beautiful like another girl he knew—how many generations ago was it? How long ago had her grandchildren died?

Would he know Carol's grandchildren? Her great-grandchildren?

"I'm not interested in Carol," he said curtly.

"I know you're drunk, Brad," Les leaned across the desk, speaking distinctly as though to force the meaning of his words through the curtain of intoxication. "But are you sincerely not interested in her?"

Brad nodded brusquely, his chin jutting out.

"Then you won't mind if I aim my sights at something that seems as high as your Station right now. I figure that maybe within the next hundred generations the race *might* produce another Carol Sanders—not before."

Brad emptied the bottle in his glass and drank it, his cheeks flushing. After he was sure it was going to stay down, he said, "You've got a green light, Les. She's all yours."

"And what does Brad get as his part of the bargain?"

Les whirled around. Brad looked up at Carol standing in the doorway, her features rigidly set.

"Now that I'm through being traded, wrapped and delivered," she said, "let's turn our speculative thoughts to a more pressing matter."

Her heels beat an angry tattoo across the floor as she came to the desk. "O'Connor's holding a high

priority message out there, but he's afraid to bring it in because he says the chief is drunk. The message says your Washington agent has learned the Trans-At franchise is going to be dropped next week when it comes up for renewal . . . Cause?—That half-mile short drop-in on the East Coast terminal last week was considered a disqualifying violation."

Brad's eyes closed and his head wavered. "The hell with it," he said. "Drop the thing. I don't want it any more. Liquidate the holdings." He lowered his head onto his forearm on the desk.

"Rather drunk, isn't he?" Carol looked helplessly at Les.

"Rather," he agreed. "Just a moment ago he was talking about being a god."

Her face tensed momentarily, then relaxed.

"I think he's going to be sick," said Les.

Carol rolled up the sleeves of her smock with determined motions. "Get some hot coffee," she instructed, heading for the lavatory. "I'll drag out the cold rags. When you get back you can shove him under the shower."

"Uh—Carol," he called out after her. "I'd appreciate it if you'd forget what you overheard."

She said nothing.

* * *

EVERY muscle tensed, Shiva stood beneath the collonade of the two-hundred-foot-high temple that was a masterpiece of carved marble and sandstone. The robed figure was dwarfed by huge pillars in the shape of grotesque human forms, each supporting the overhang of the roof on its head and upraised fingertips.

A broad grin seized his face, as he watched the nuclojet appear over the mountain top and settle down on the lawn in front of the steps. Even before the craft came to rest its passenger leaped out and raced up the steps.

Shiva turned before the man arrived at the entrance. He strode in, heading toward his office and beckoning to the other to follow.

He held the door open while the man, breathing heavily, brushed in and continued to the desk, his stride unbroken. Shiva locked the door and joined him.

The man tossed an irregular, metallic object on the desk top and stepped back, his expression begging for a word of approval.

"The rock?" Shiva asked excitedly.

"The rock," the man verified. "Orange got it and relayed it to Green. He thought I ought to get over here with it right away. He called?"

"Of course. What do you think I was waiting for?"

Shiva picked up the object and turned it over between his fingers several times. "Commendable work, Red," he said. "Tell Orange and Green I am well pleased."

He tossed it in the air, caught it and dropped into his chair, placing the mass on the desk directly before him. "What's it supposed to be?"

Red shrugged.

"You ought to know," Shiva said with annoyance. "You're supposed to be an expert on metal."

"But I haven't run any tests yet."

"What's your guess?"

"Well, it looks like something that's been subjected to terrific skin heat. It resembles a good many meteorites I've seen."

"Meteorite?" Shiva asked puzzledly. Then he shoved it aside. "Did you bring the drawing?"

"The reproduction of the map? —Here." Red handed over the folded paper.

Shiva spread it open before him. Then he leaped from the chair in astonishment.

"Why, it's . . . it's . . . !"

He held the paper shakily in his hands while he repeatedly articulated the name of the town near the end of the pencilled flight route.

"That notation, 'depth, 70 ft.,'" Red offered, "also leads me to believe this thing may have been a

meteor that buried itself in the ground."

Shiva stared at the map and the object, alternately, thoughtfully. He imagined the two should touch off some associated train of memories in his mind. But somehow they didn't.

"What were they doing with the thing?"

"Orange said they had set up laboratory equipment to subject it to high temperatures."

Shiva's frown became deeper. Heat was another clue, a clue that should have unveiled the association his mind was groping for. But it didn't.

"Did Orange spirit this thing away without covering up?" he asked.

"Started to. But Green put it off a few hours while I manufactured a reproduction to slip in its place."

"Then they don't suspect it's gone?"

"Most probably not."

"All right. Get to work on it. Find out what it is. Where it comes from. What it's worth. What it's for. What happens when it is heated up . . . Work on it in the laboratory here."

"But what happens," Red protested, "when I turn up missing over there?"

"Nothing. You're just an assistant who walked out. We won't

need you there any longer anyway."

Red pocketed the mass of metal and left the office.

SHIVA folded his arms over the embroider work on his ceremonial robe and stood staring out the window at the purple-tinged Verdugo Mountains in which his main temple nestled.

If only he could project a perceptive thread into Laboratory D! Then he could observe what was going on without being seen, even while he sat in his office. But the laboratory had been sealed off for years now . . . It wasn't a material shield that prevented his psycho-receptive pulses from entering. It was a psychokinetic protective aura maintained by the subconscious processes of Brad Darson—an aura identical to the one that he, Shiva, had established around his main temple. Both auras were comprised of the same impenetrable force that efficiently protected them from each other's lances of unseen destruction.

Shiva sighed forlornly. It had been stalemate now for a long time—for almost two generations . . . He could not injure Darson physically or psychically. Darson could not hurt him.

For over fifty years they had not attacked each other. It was not that he wasn't willing to con-

tinue trying to break Darson's shield. It was that he was convinced of the uselessness of such tactics. He knew also that Darson's reluctance to attack reflected neither fear nor frustration. Rather, Darson held back the force because each encounter was an open invitation to destruction, death that might affect hundreds of others in the vicinity.

Until now it had been two worlds, not one: Shiva's expanding sphere . . . and Darson's, which might be said to be holding its own, he thought.

Shiva laughed confidently . . . It wouldn't be that way long.

CHAPTER V

BRAD clutched the arm rests of his chair as he strained forward to stare into the face of the man who stood rigidly on the other side of the desk. He was a large, big-shouldered individual with hands that stretched below his cuffs like bludgeons.

"I can't believe it!" Brad said incredulously.

The man dropped his gaze guiltily to the floor.

"Hell, Chet," Brad walked around the desk and stood beside him, looking into his face, "I picked you myself — three years ago. Remember? I even convinced Waymore you were the

first he should sign up for the Station crew."

Chet turned his face away.

Brad sighed despondently and exchanged glances with Les and Carol, seated at one end of the desk.

"How did you do it, Chet?" he asked suddenly.

The man shrugged. "A faulty transformer in the video circuit that couldn't carry the load through more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty remote activations . . . A timing device in the tanks that detonated the bulkhead separating the less-than-critical masses of fuel."

"But why, Chet? *Why?*"

"Well, you see—Shiva . . ."

"Shiva!" Les leaped up.

"Of course, Shiva," Brad snorted. "He's been behind all space project-wrecking moves for the past thirty-five years."

Les was still frowning quizzically.

"He's building *his kingdom* on earth," Brad explained bitingly. "I don't imagine he's receptive to the idea of his potential *subjects* wandering out of his sphere of control."

He turned back to Chet. "What moved you to make this confession?"

"I lived in L.A. before I joined up with you. I was a member of the central cult . . . Sure I believed in Shiva!" His voice rose

suddenly. "I still do."

Then his words dropped almost to a whisper. "But blowing up metal hulls in space with only instruments in them is one thing . . . Soon you're going to be sending up manned craft. I don't want anything to do with this business when there are people in those hulls thousands of billions of miles away from home . . . So I'm finished with this sabotage detail; I don't care who orders it—even Shiva!"

Brad let himself limply back into the chair. "Okay, Chet. Take the next shuttle back up to the Station."

Chet's face, contorting, raced through a series of expressions; settling for one of mixed surprise and disbelief.

"What!" Les shouted, leaping up and knocking his chair over. "You're going to let him *go back*!"

He turned to Carol. "He's broken down! The man needs psycho reconditioning!"

"Chet." The girl looked at the huge man who was shifting uneasily. "You say you still believe in Shiva?"

He lowered his eyes.

"You're an intelligent engineer." She spoke the words slowly, convincingly. "You should realize as quickly as anyone that he's a fraud."

"He's not!" the Station man

protested, reddening.

CAROL set her teeth tightly together. "He's a cheap fraud with an assortment of sensational tricks in his bag. He's a charlatan. A phony!"

Chet balled his huge fists "If you were a man . . ." He glowered at her.

Brad rushed around the desk. Les advanced on the man from the other side, his hand reaching out restrainingly for the spaceman's shoulder.

"The hell with your job," Chet stared back at Brad. "I don't want it!" He turned and strode through the door.

Les looked reprovingly at Brad. "Chief, you're a genius. But sometimes you run out of brains. I hope Carol proved that within a week he'd be ready again to take orders from his superior—his real superior."

Brad nodded submissively and walked over to the window.

Then he spun around suddenly. "Les, do you know what this means? It means the final robot test flight would have been a success! Chet's confession was tantamount to removing the last bug!"

He smiled and enthusiasm spread over him like a visible cloak as he paced the floor eagerly. "We will get on with the plans . . . Les, you recruit a volunteer crew

of three. Contact the Station and tell them to go ahead with converting the X-20 . . . Carol, you get in touch with bioclimatology and have Hartley send a crew upstairs. I want the X-20 as livable as a sun parlor."

He went back to the desk and began scribbling notes rapidly.

Carol pushed a cigarette between his lips and held the desk lighter under it. "I hope this flood of gusto means you'll have more drive to go after the Trans-At franchise again. It isn't too late, you know. It's only been a week since it slipped out of our hands."

He puffed on the cigarette and stubbed it out. "No," he said determinedly. "Our phase of ocean hopping with passengers is over."

"But that was your chief source of income to sustain the laboratories," she persisted.

"Sure, Brad," Les agreed. "That was your main money maker."

"We're through making money now . . . We've reached the spending stage." Brad punched a button on the desk. "O'Connor," he spoke into the communicator. "Get in here. Bring Monrow with you."

LESS than a minute later O'Connor, cleaning his eyeglasses, and Brad's attorney entered. Brad addressed the latter. "I want you to clear the way for

setting up a private educational institution. We're going to start training two thousand young men to push buttons on space craft. Get a charter under the name 'National Spacemen's Academy,' or something like that.

"O'Connor, you draw up a list of assets, resources, as of today. On the basis of one and a half million per ship, estimate how many craft half our available capital will build."

"You want to plan on complete liquidation of all other holdings?" the secretary asked.

"All except one main laboratory—and, of course, the Station."

Monrow puffed on his cigar. "You may run into some trouble getting a charter to train those men."

Brad stretched his fingers wide on the desk. "Then we'll do it on an international basis, if we can't do it otherwise. We'll get a fleet of mothball carriers and conduct our operations from them . . . O'Connor, find out what we can buy aircraft carriers for."

O'Connor and the lawyer left.

"Les," Brad suggested, "you'd better relay those orders to the Station. Then come back and we will draw up some more plans."

After Les left, Carol came over and placed her hand over Brad's. "I'm happy to see you finally shrugged off that 'rock' experi-



ment defeat like this." She smiled.

He looked away, hiding the sullenness that suddenly swept over his face.

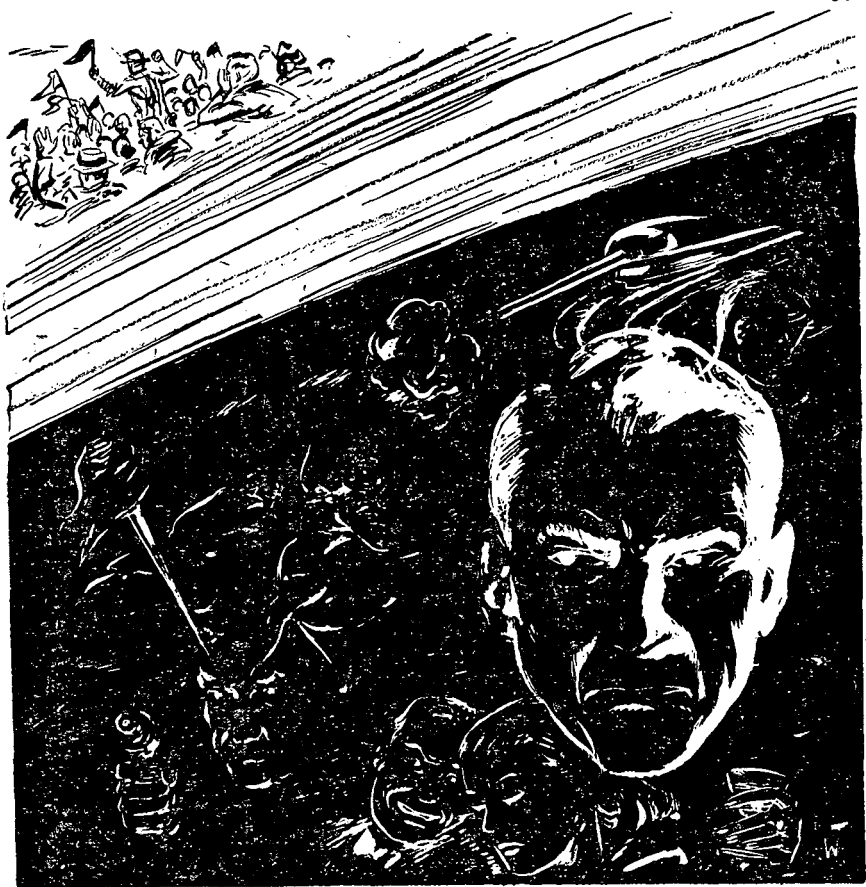
"Care to tell me what it was all about now?" she asked.

He didn't answer.

"It couldn't have been very important—it came up so suddenly,"

she offered. "And it seems to be finished already."

He centered his eyes on a reflection of her face in the chrome lamp-stand base. Experimentally, he tried to ignore her beauty—look upon her as impersonally as he would any other woman. But it didn't work.



"I had made plans around that lump of metal for almost fifty" He bit his lips, then went on, " . . . for what seemed like fifty or a hundred years. At any rate, it took quite an extensive search to find it. But apparently my hypotheses were wrong."

"And nōw," she laughed lightly,

"we can forget about it."

"Yes," he agreed glumly.

"Even without telling me what your ideas were?"

Again he was silent.

Les fe-entered, holding up a wire-transmitted copy of the afternoon newspaper. "See this chief?" he asked, placing it on the

desk.

Brad read the headline:
COMET PREDICTION BY
SHIVA VERIFIED

The story carried a Los Angeles dateline and read:

Scientists at Palomar Observatory last night announced they had sighted for the first time a comet whose existence and position had been prophesied over a week ago by Shiva, the self-styled Hindu "deity," at a time when it was out of range of the most powerful telescope.

The celestial object, named "The Fist of Shiva" by its predictor, is believed to be headed in the general direction of Earth . . .

His eyes dropped to a smaller story whose headlines announced:

THOUSANDS JOINING
CULT OF HINDU 'GOD'

Brad looked up and Les laughed. "I haven't yet reached the point of losing my skepticism."

"Good," Brad smiled. "You can hang on to that contribution for a while then."

Taking Carol by the arm, Les went toward the door. Brad watched them leave the office, his eyes studying the girl's back. When they were gone, he lay his head back in the chair and closed his eyes.

Now his ego no longer responded to physical sensations. Instead, his superconscious was only aware

of the vast, pressing nothingness of space as his parapsyche streaked away from the shining blue-green globe.

Ahead, at a remote distance beyond the pitted, milky-white sphere that hung nearby, was the Fist of Shiva.

CAROL left Les on the second floor and walked down to the first. In front of the freight elevator, she paused and looked in both directions down the hall. No one was in sight.

Quickly, she stepped onto the platform and sent it down to the storage sub-level. Down the corridor, she went cautiously past the open door of the lighted room. The clerk had his back turned, so she passed unseen, unheard.

In the main storage vault, her eyes scanned the room for the odd-sized crates that contained the air-restorer units. They should be near the entrance, she assured herself, remembering that they had been sent over from the other laboratory only a short while before — on the same day that Brad had flown to the mysterious spot indicated on the pencil-drawn map and had returned with a lump of gray metal. Laboratory C was in the general direction of the site where the 'rock' had obviously been dug from the ground.

She found the area where the

air-restorers were stored.

As she walked over to the bulky crates, she thought of the small lump of metal. Practically its entire area was gray, rough, pitted. But one small surface was smooth, shiny—as though it had been broken off from a greater mass.

Hesitatingly, she surveyed the dozen crates. There was nothing about any one that distinguished it from the others—except perhaps the one on the end nearest the wall. There was red lettering on it.

She stood before it and read:

"Defective—Hold in Stock."

This could be it, she thought.

Eagerly, she attacked the wing-nuts that held on the lid. There were four of them. They all unscrewed easily.

The cover off, she brushed hair out of her face and bent over to look in the box.

Footsteps!

Carol darted around the side of the crate, taking the lid with her, and squeezed in between two taller boxes.

The clerk walked down the aisle where she was hiding.

She held her breath.

He went past, got a small plastic carton off a shelf at the end of the aisle and returned.

Again she held her breath and again he went by, apparently noticing neither her nor the uncovered box.

When he had gone, she stepped out and glanced quickly into the crate.

She had been right! The metal was identical to the piece she had handled.

Excitedly, she wedged a corner of the cover under a small, slender protuberance on the mass. Then, using the edge of the box as a fulcrum, she put her weight on the other side of the lid. The slender knob snapped off and arched out into the aisle.

Carol retrieved it and slipped it into the pocket of her smock.

Then she replaced the lid on the crate and secured its bolts.

* * *

THE communicator signal buzzed harshly, impatiently on Shiva's desk. He threw the switch.

"They've decided to send out the manned rocket!" the voice barked excitedly.

"Is this Green?"

"Yes . . . They're going ahead with it!"

Shiva sat back and laughed—boisterously, long. Then he calmed himself. "They were taken in?"

"Completely."

"What happened to Black?"

"After he got through with his confession Darson blessed him and told him to get back to work!"

"No!" Shiva exploded in dis-

belief. "You mean he was fool enough to want Black on the Station again?"

"That's what Black reported."

"The fool! The lenient, simple fool! Maybe I should have let Black return. It would have been amusing to make a two-time simpleton out of Darson with the same agent."

"That might have been the wiser course." The voice was indulgently reproving. "Black was a good man to have on the Station. I'm wondering whether it was worth his services just to coax Darson into continuing with his manned ship experiment."

"Agents are expendable. Anyway, I've already received other reports that the maneuver's desired end was achieved . . . Even now they're riding on a false sense of security. And you say they are ready to stumble blindly into their last experiment."

"What good does that do us?"

"The quicker they send out the flight, the quicker they lose the ship with its personnel. When the government learns people have been sacrificed in a mad experiment, it will be easy to get the courts to padlock their enterprise."

"Hell, I'm not sure that'll work. Darson's been able to keep his failures secret."

"He won't keep this one secret—not when Yellow quits the Sta-

tion disgustedly and tells how three ships, the last one manned, were all destroyed in tests."

There was a silence over the communicator. Presently Green spoke. "I'm afraid Darson might still be one step ahead of you. He's out to acquire a fleet of obsolete aircraft carriers. Looks like he intends to run his business on the open seas if any more governments interfere with him."

Shiva stared absently across the room. Slowly, he smiled. Then he spoke softly into the communicator.

"I understand from recorded history that carriers became obsolete because they could be easily sunk. I don't think sitting in permanent drydocks has made them any less vulnerable."

THE conversation over, Shiva collected his robes about him and stepped into the small elevator set in the rear wall of his office.

At the temple's second sub-surface level he strode out and crossed the polished floor of a huge laboratory. Red's figure was silhouetted by the steady, brilliant white flame of a small, raw fire before which he stood.

"Find out what it is yet?" Shiva drew up beside him and stared at the lump of metal suspended in the torch's jet.

"The damned thing defied analy-

sis," Red said without looking around. "Frankly, I haven't any idea what it's comprised of . . . I've called in a couple of experts from back East. They may be able to get somewhere. In the meantime I'm heating it to see what happens. I have practically the same setup that Darson was going to use."

"What do you think's going to happen?"

"I'll let you know in about five minutes."

Shiva leaned against the table and watched the mass hypnotically. Even as it began to change color while it achieved greater incandescence, he did not move his eyes.

Within five minutes it was white hot, seemingly even more brilliant than the flame which fed it.

A frown of puzzlement spread over Shiva's forehead. He must concentrate. He knew there was something he *must* remember! The sphere-like mass, brilliantly aglow, was a vaguely familiar thing.

Suddenly he was trembling and his fists tightened until his nails dug into the flesh of his palms.

He seized Red's shoulder and spun him around. "It *definitely* could be a meteorite?" he demanded.

Red nodded. "I think so."

"It could have been heated to the same degree of incandescence

in plunging through the atmosphere?"

"Undoubtedly it must have been."

Shiva's strained breath blew hotly into the agent's face and he clamped down on Red's shoulder in a brutal grip. "An in a fall it could have appeared much larger than that, couldn't it?"

"Might have. The aura of incandescence might have spread out over a large area. Then, too, anyone observing it fall might have been the victim of psychological exaggeration."

"But there could be more to it than this?"

"It's possible . . ."

Shiva released the agent and backed away. His voice was a hoarse whisper. "*Then I'm no god! It was an accident!*"

Red frowned at him in confusion.

Shiva's face twisted as an expression reflecting sudden realization seized his features. "*And if it happened to me it could happen to anyone else! Even you!*" he shouted, pointing a finger at the agent.

Bewilderment, fright leaped into Red's eyes.

Shiva advanced on him. *Even now*, he thought—*even now the change could have already taken place! Even this exposure of a few minutes could have been suf-*

ficient!

He stiffened. Then he summoned his telepathic powers and sent an unspoken sentence spearing toward the other's mind:

If you can receive my thoughts you are a god, like me.

Red's coat constricted suddenly with terror and he clamped his hands over his ears. Then he screamed.

Shiva braced himself mentally and lashed out at the agent with a single, violent blast of hellish destruction. The agent disappeared in a shimmering flash. Only a circular, black incrustation lay on the floor to mark the spot where he had stood.

But even before the brilliance of the blast disappeared, Shiva turned his attention to the still glowing lump of metal! With another forceful display of psychokinetic energy, he teleported the thing a million miles away. There, in the star-studded vacuum, he imparted to it a terrific impetus and watched it speed on its course out of the Solar System.

CHAPTER VI

AGAINST the brilliantly span-gled ebony blanket of infinity, the Fist of Shiva was a magnificent green teardrop — frightening, awesome, expanding in size as Brad's detached superconscious approach-

ed.

Motionless, Brad stood at a distance and surveyed the dazzling celestial object as it sped past him and continued its inexorable rush toward the central regions of the Solar System.

Even now, he realized suddenly, it should have been close enough for the nebulous material that surrounded it to be forced away in the form of a tail by light pressure of the sun's radiation. But instead, the comet dust stayed close to the main ball, pressing in upon it like a dense halo. He wondered why.

Passing it in its flight, he stood on its course and directed at it a stream of deflecting psychokinetic energy.

Nothing happened.

Even the small amount of force behind his thrust should have caused it to swerve slightly off course.

He retreated before it at a much faster speed, swerving off its course once more and then turning to concentrate another blast of force at the object.

This time the intensity of the blast was sufficient to attain visible proportions. Like molten steel falling to a concrete floor, the lance splattered against the comet in a brilliant pyrotechnical display.

But still the comet did not alter its course by even the smallest

angle.

Puzzled, Brad drew alongside and studied it. Undoubtedly, he had used sufficient force. The last bolt, he imagined, would have been almost intense enough to disintegrate at least a small portion of the object. But its surface was unaffected.

Angered, he mustered the total intensity of the destructive power within him and hurled it savagely outward.

Flaming hell broke loose all along the surface of the stubborn globe. It was a sustained blast that outshone the remote sun toward which the comet was hurtling.

When the blast subsided it was obvious that still not the smallest change had been effected in the course, speed or outward appearance of the comet.

Grimly, Brad swept through the Stygian expanse of nothingness, paralleling the thing, studying its form in bewilderment.

It was large—a quarter or half the size of the moon. Through its nebulous blanket he could almost discern surface features. The comet had a solid nucleus—a large solid core. No nebulous mass of dust particles was this celestial behemoth.

Cautiously, he drew closer for a more thorough inspection. And it grew larger in his field of vision. Now it occupied almost half the

celestial sphere.

Suddenly his approach halted. He had not consciously directed a halt in his advance.

He willed himself to continue to the surface.

But he could draw no closer! It was as though an invisible, impenetrable barrier existed between him and the Fist of Shiva!

Brad's parapsyche circled to the other side and he tried another approach. But again he was stopped.

Abruptly there was comprehension . . . The comet was shielded by a totally enveloping psychokinetic barrier, a barrier constructed and sustained by subconscious intent—Russell Granet's or Shiva's subconscious intent!

Stunned, Brad drifted along with the object in a lethargy of near despair—a half hour, an hour . . . The sensational manifestations that Shiva had wrought with his special powers had been many over the half century during which he had boasted of eternal youth and claimed to be a god.

There had been convincing earthquakes, and tidal waves and volcanoes and fires— for all of which he had assumed responsibility. And each ruse had succeeded in swelling toward gigantic proportions the cult of which he was the self-proclaimed head.

But this was the first time he

had employed a universal threat and had insured against interference.

* * *

CAROL closed the door behind her and strode over to the desk. "Hartley wants to know how big a crew to prepare the X-20 for."

Brad didn't move.

"Mr. Brains," she called, staring at him. He sat stiff in the chair, his head back against its cushioned rest, his eyes closed. But he could not be asleep, she reasoned. His figure was too upright for that.

She called his name louder.

But he did not stir.

Suddenly she gasped, throwing her hand in front of her mouth. Her note pad dropped to the floor.

Brad was not breathing!

Dumfounded she could not remove her eyes from his motionless chest.

Then she snapped into action and rushed around the desk, grasping his wrist and groping for his pulse.

"Oh, Brad!" she sobbed as she knelt beside his chair and clutched his arm desperately.

The rationality that was left within her tried to suggest that he had suffered a heart attack. Then the hope shouted it might not

be too late to do something. But despair was the stronger sentiment that held her in a rigid, trembling heap beside his chair.

Abruptly, she stiffened—unconscious of the hopelessness, the sense of loss that had thrust itself into her chest like the blade of a knife.

Trembling violently now, she released his arm as though she had been holding a poisonous snake. Her wet eyes wide with terror, she leaped up, backing away and stifling a scream.

His arm had been hard! Not stiff, as though in death. But *hard*—like granite, like the most dense alloy.

Beating down the waves of fright, she went back to the chair, extending a shaking hand to his face, touched his cheek.

It was cold! It was like touching a diamond!

Disheveled hair hung down across his forehead.

Bewildered and terrorized, she raised her numb fingers to brush it back upon his head.

But it would not move! His hair was like bristles of steel that could neither be bent nor snapped off!

Petrifying fright was an almost overpowering sensation now as she cast her eyes wildly about the room. But she fought the impulse to flee from the building—to forget her purpose and leave the laboratory, never to return. Even

in her bewildered consternation, a rational thread of mentality called out to her that she must stay, that she had no alternative.

Quickly, she crossed to the lavatory and entered, hiding behind the door where she could see through its crack into the office.

* * *

BRAD'S head nodded forward. He brushed the hair off his face as he rose from the chair and began pacing in front of the desk. There was dismay in his features. His head hung low and his fists were clenched tightly.

In front of the desk his foot kicked a note pad that lay on the rug. But he ignored it as he leaned forward and studied the front page of the paper Les had brought.

There was a picture on the sheet—a picture of a colossal temple that dwarfed the human figures which stood on pyramid-like steps leading up to the main entrance. Dominating the edifice was the gigantic stone figure of a leering god whose waist flowed into the curved lines of the largest of three domes comprising the roof. Arms upraised in supplication and face tilted toward the sky, the great statue stared with burning eyes. Its cruelly twisted lips bared sharp, fang-like teeth.

It was the central Temple of

Shiva. Inset in the engraving was a smaller picture—one of Shiva.

Brad wondered how much resemblance the features in the inset bore to those of the leering god atop the dome. Or was it merely psychological consideration that suggested the similarity?

How long had it been since he had seen his brother? Thirty-five years? Forty?

He walked to the window and stood staring out into the western sky.

There was a knock at his door. But he was only dimly aware of the disturbance as he reached into the inner core of his mentality for the total power of his super-consciousness.

He disappeared. Like the extinguishment of a light, he was gone.

A muffled gasp sounded from the lavatory.

THE knock at the door repeated itself impatiently.

Presently the door opened and Les entered. He looked casually at the vacant desk and turned around.

"O'Connor," he called through the doorway. "I thought you said the chief was in?"

"Of course he is."

Les walked to the lavatory. The door was wide open and it was obvious no one was in there.

"Better get yourself tested for

new-glasses," he laughed as he walked out past O'Connor's desk.

Frowning, O'Connor looked into the inner room.

"That's odd," he exclaimed. "I was sure he was there." He followed Les down the hall. "If you see Mr. Darson tell him I'm taking off early for lunch."

The secretary stopped at an elevator, but Les continued toward his private laboratory.

At his worktable, he stood before two units of electronic equipment—mazes of tubes, resistors and wires. He got a length of wire with metal clamps on each end from the drawer. Attaching one end to the plate lead atop a tube in the set on the left, he stretched the other end to the second unit and made another temporary connection. He extended another wire from the first unit to his ear.

"Let me have the chief," he said suddenly, speaking softly into the crystal pickup of the unit on his left. He waited for almost half a minute.

"... Okay," he said. "This is from Lab D..."

Interrupted, he listened.

"Yeah, it's me. Who else? Now listen, I don't have much time: The X-20 is being converted. It'll blast off..."

"... How'd you know?"

"... Oh. Well, anyway, here's the joker. I'm going to make the

first hop..."

"... Now wait, chief. Don't lose all your steam. I've already told you I'm interested in this business. When you sent me on the job I said you were making a mistake—that I'm a scientist at heart and that there was a good chance I'd desert you..."

Frowning, Les waited and listened for fully fifteen seconds.

"If that's the way you feel," he said gruffly, "you can have my resignation now..."

"Okay, then. I'll stick. But it'll be on my terms. I'll still report in because I'm convinced Darson's an okay guy and I know all my reports will be complimentary. But I'm going to make that first hop."

He paused once more while he pressed the receiver closer to his ear.

"Now don't try any threats," his face set itself more firmly. "They don't work with me. You've got my terms and you'll have to meet me all the way..."

"... We should be ready to shove off in two or three days... That's right, there'll be a report as soon as I get down from the Station."

Les disconnected the shunt and placed the wire in the drawer.

BRAD stepped from a clump of bushes near the roadway in

front of the temple. He could neither see nor feel it, but the shield that was too dense to admit his perceptive probes lay immediately in front of him. He felt as though he could almost reach out and touch the force field.

Stepping onto the roadway, he joined a group of Shivaites headed toward the huge edifice. He walked along with them for twenty or thirty feet, then dropped behind. Once more he stepped into a group of flowering shrubs. He was past the shield. Now his psychokinetic powers could be used without restraint within the shielded area.

He closed his eyes. Suddenly he was looking across a psychic bridge into the office of the temple. Shiva was there—alone. Brad teleported into the room and stood before the desk.

Startled, Shiva leaped up. But almost immediately he regained his composure and reseated himself, smiling and folding his hands on the desk.

Brad braced himself, mentally and psychically. His features became taut.

"Since I value the furnishings here," Shiva said calmly, "you may relax. I have long been aware of the uselessness of force between us."

Brad relaxed—all but his eyes. Tensely, he stared into his brother's face.

"Undoubtedly," Shiva prodded, "something moved you to pay me this visit. What is it?"

"Why are you interfering with my space project?" Brad demanded coldly.

"My dear brother, I assure you that I am not . . ."

"That is a lie," Brad accused. "Chet confessed."

"Chet?—I have no idea who Chet is."

It was apparent Russell Granet would admit nothing. Brad fought the temptation to hurl forth a psychokinetic blast, knowing it would be useless.

"Please, Clark," Shiva feigned an entreaty in an obviously sarcastic gesture, "no cosmic display. If this temple is damaged, I assure you that many of your holdings are quite vulnerable for retaliatory purposes."

It wasn't the threat that restrained Brad. "You're still willing to let others suffer, I see, in an attempt to settle our differences. To you all humanity is still nothing but an inexhaustible supply of pawns for a chess game."

"I don't deny those sentiments, however crudely you may be expressing them," Shiva rose, folding his arms. "What are others, if you'll allow me to be a little dramatic myself?—Insects, flies, pawns? Call them what you like."

Brad hissed disgustedly. "Then

you are still convinced you are a god. And you're continuing your strategy of sabotage so your *subjects* can't become scientifically inclined and go darting away from under your nose to other worlds."

Shiva's smile was the only answer.

It was increasingly irking Brad. "But they are going to, Russell." He made no attempt at constraining his voice. "Soon the first will experience the accomplishment of gaining another star system, finding another world."

Brad waited.

"Is that what you came here to discuss?" his brother asked finally.

"No," Brad replied. "I want to impress upon you the fact that your material holdings are much more extensive than mine—more vulnerable."

"Now, brother." Scorn was thicker in the other's voice. "You're forgetting that I am perfectly willing to revert to roughhouse tactics—any time you're ready to initiate them. What are a few temples? They can be easily rebuilt. As a matter of fact, I welcome the opportunity to have some of my followers martyred to science. There's no quicker way of rejuvenating the interest of potential converts."

A fury was raging inside Brad's head. But he tried not to let it

find further expression in his features.

Suddenly Shiva laughed. "I imagine you find it quite deplorable that I have finally maneuvered into a commanding position. You must admit the comet is an ingenious instrument, together with its shield. It shall perhaps be the proverbial stone that will kill not one, but all the birds I'm after."

Brad leaned forward over the desk. "What about the comet? What do you intend doing with it?"

"The plan is simple. I've never hidden, not even to authorities, the fact that my aim is to enfold all humanity in one mass beneath me . . . The world for Shiva. My following has grown. There are hundreds of millions paying homage now. My power can reach into any earth government. But that isn't enough. There will be *no other authority*. Either I'll have the world, or I'll destroy it and select another with intelligence upon it . . . There are others, you know. I learned that during the seventy-five years you thought I had disappeared completely."

BRAD was speechless with fury. "No, Clark," Shiva continued. "In this new world there will be no place for you—or your science. There will be no space projects—just earth . . . my earth . . . or there won't be any earth."

"Then the comet is a weapon of coercion?"

"I believe that's what I've just said. All earth governments will get the ultimatum soon . . . It's fun, Clark—this business. You should have joined me in it."

"You won't do it!" Brad said incredulously, his voice low.

"We shall wait and let time resolve my ability to carry through the plan."

Brad smiled suddenly. "I've a simple solution," he announced eagerly, wondering why he hadn't thought of it before. "I'll merely throw up a shield around earth—just like the one you have around that thing out there in space."

A coarse laugh interrupted him. "I'd expected you would," Shiva said confidently. "The result should be quite interesting. Perhaps you and I shall resolve the eternal proposition — what would happen should an irresistible force meet an immovable object. We'll observe it together."

Utterly hopeless, Brad turned dully and headed for the door.

"There is another interesting aspect that bears watching," Shiva called after him. "Can you imagine how long you'll stay in control of your rockets when people learn the comet is on a direct collision course? But perhaps that won't be your problem when the time comes. I understand another in-

junction is about to be issued to restrain operations from your present site."

Rather than listen to the derisive laughter he knew was coming, Brad teleported back to the fringe of the shield surrounding the temple and walked across the area of invisible restriction.

Even as he teleported back into his office, he re-erected the shield around his own cluster of laboratory buildings.

The laugh that Brad had expected broke the sudden silence in Shiva's office. But it was cut short as the communicator buzzed.

"This is Green," the voice said after Shiva opened the two-way circuit. "They're preparing their manned rocket."

"I know. Everyone has his instructions. There are no changes in the plans."

"Anything else that has to be taken care of?"

"The rock . . . have you located any more of it?"

"No. We scoured every laboratory facility in Labs A through E."

CHAPTER VII

BRAD put out another cigarette in the heap of smoldering butts that almost overflowed his ash tray. He nervously lit another.

Carol, leaning against the edge

of the desk, fidgeted with a hem of her laboratory apron.

"I've never seen you this unsettled," she said, not looking into his drawn face.

The intercommunication box sputtered and he tensed. But no words came out of the speaker.

"Why, Carol?" he pleaded suddenly. "Why did Les do it?"

She shrugged. "He wanted to surprise you. He thought he could have the flight over with and spare you the nervous tension of sweating it out."

"But why did *he* have to go without consulting me?"

"Les knew you'd never consent to his being the third member of the crew. He knew you'd spout off about his being too valuable. And . . ."

He interrupted her, shouting into the intercom, "Am I still connected with the Station?"

"Yes, sir," the submissive voice came back.

"Anything on the tape yet?"

"No, sir. A report should be coming through now."

"It's two minutes late, isn't it?"

There was no answer for a moment. Then, "It's coming through now, chief."

Brad waited. Carol leaned closer to the box.

"It's three-point-six," the voice finally sounded.

Carol relaxed. But Brad's ex-

pression did not change.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

Why hide it, he thought. "They are still dropping behind the schedule we figured out."

"Why?"

Answerless he looked away. "That's why I wanted the flight to be held off for another few days. Kastling's only a few hours away from solving the problem of direct voice connection through hyper."

"But whatever's wrong is only causing a delay, isn't it?" Her face was twisted into a heavy frown. "It doesn't mean they might not—come back?"

Brad glanced into her tense eyes. "You want him back, don't you?" he asked solicitously.

Her eyes opened wider for a moment. Then they narrowed again into an impersonal stare.

"Of course I want him to come back," she snapped.

"Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Darrson," O'Connor was at the door. "But you've disconnected the intercommunication system and there's a Mr. Clyde Harrison—from the state Supreme Court."

THE man nudged O'Connor aside and walked in. There was a stiff, folded document in his hand. He gave it to Brad.

"I have a court order here," he announced. "It temporarily re-

strains you from conducting extraterrestrial flights anywhere in this state. I call to your attention the fact that a hearing has been set—the date noted therein—to decide whether a permanent injunction is to be issued against you.”

Tensely, Brad spread the document open and read it.

“You will close down your Space Station,” the server continued, “but you will not be allowed to land it or other equipment in this state. You may, however, land one craft—to return your personnel.”

“There’s nothing here,” Brad tapped the sheet with the back of his fingers, “that concerns the Station. Anyway, it is not in the jurisdiction of this state.”

“But . . .,” the server began.

“There is also nothing authorizing you or any agent of the state to interfere with any other operations, other than to post guards around the space crafts.”

The secretary was still in the doorway.

“O’Connor,” Brad called, “please show Mr. Harrison out . . . and find Monrow.”

Harrison, red faced, left.

Brad followed him to the door, dropped his hand on O’Connor’s shoulder.

The secretary looked at him expectantly. “What are we going to do?” he asked.

“As soon as we settle down from

this first flight we’ll dismantle the ships and get them aboard carriers, as we planned.”

O’Connor’s small eyes blinked behind his thick glasses. “But you can’t expect anyone to try to land one of those things on a floating ship!”

“I know, O’Connor. I’ll handle the flights myself until we can find an island and a government willing to sell it.”

Carol was standing by the window. “Brad,” she called, pointing toward the rocket landing field.

He went over and looked. Several State Guard trucks were barring the three entrances to the barbed-wire enclosed field. Scores of armed troops were beginning to take their posts.

“Mr. Darson,” the intercommunication box sputtered.

He raced across the room, Carol following.

“Yes.”

“X-20 at three-point-six-five.”

Brad checked his watch. “She’s fallen behind another minute!”

“Yes, sir,” the voice agreed glumly.

Brad’s fingers clenched and unclenched nervously.

“Carol,” he said suddenly. “How about going down to the cafeteria and selecting a nice lunch for me? Have yours while you’re down there.”

“Now?”

"Yes, now," he said sternly.

"Guess I'll be better off if I do stop listening to the bad news." She paused to powder her face.

After she had gone he leaned forward and lowered his head onto the desk, closing his eyes. *Out there, he thought, almost all the way to the star slightly larger than the sun, with its smaller companion.* With his psychic vision, he searched . . . Now he saw it.

* * *

THE drumming of the main drive converter beat monotonously into Les' brain. He ran fingers over the stubbles on his chin, surveyed the confines of his small compartment, and returned his eyes hopelessly to the louvered cabinet, watching its indicator needles fluctuate alarmingly.

He removed another panel from the cabinet and began making adjustments with a screw driver.

"Find the trouble?" Matthews' strained voice sounded from the main compartment.

"Not yet," he shouted back.

"Try to hurry." Arlington, also in the other compartment, made no attempt to conceal the plea in his voice. "The whole damned universe outside the ports is going topsy-turvy!"

If he could only find the trouble! But then the mass-increase-

restrictor unit trouble could only be diagnosed properly in a laboratory. Supposedly, it was highly improbable that anything could go wrong while it was in use.

Matthews stepped through the hatch, stood beside Les.

"Any suggestions?" Les asked.

"I'm no electronics expert. I just pilot this crate . . . Is that the thing that's causing the trouble?"

Les adjusted another rheostat, watched for the effect on one of the indicators. There was none.

"Why is that thing so important?" Matthews asked. "And why is it causing all the hallucinations outside?"

"They're not hallucinations," Les said grimly. "Each time there's a power drop in the main circuit, our mass takes a surge upward. Greater mass, more resistance to motion and we slow down a bit. Also, we're displaced partially from the continuum whenever those needles flicker. That's what's distorting the scenery outside."

Matthews scratched his head. "It's still somewhat beyond me."

"If it wasn't for this thing," Les explained, "we wouldn't even be able to travel faster than the speed of light at all. Normally, as speed increases, mass increases. At the velocity of light, the mass of a moving body becomes infinite, offering infinite resistance to motion. There's nothing left for the



moving object to do but pop out of the continuum into some other plane that happens to be moving in the same direction at a compensating speed. There's an equation that governs it. It says m is equal to m_0 over the square root of one minus"

"Skip it. I wouldn't know what you were talking about anyway . . . The chief must be a pretty smart joker to figure out things like that and"

"Yeah," Les agreed. "He's pretty smart." He tried to conceive the true extent of the knowledge and ability Brad Darson possessed. He imagined any normal man

would have to spend generations learning as much and acquiring an equal amount of inventive genius.

Matthews joined Arlington in the other compartment. The needle fluctuated again, dipping lower on their ranges than before. Les glanced fearfully out the port. The stars did a fuzzy, mad dance, almost extinguishing themselves, then flared again to regain their normal brilliancy and clarity.

He wiped perspiration from his forehead and swore. Then, with trembling hands, he began making more adjustments.

Suddenly he tensed.

"Matthews?" he called in a low

voice. "Arlington?"

No answer.

He spun around. But there was no one in the compartment. The skin on the back of his neck tingled. There was someone in the compartment—or *something*! It was nothing he could see. But it was a presence he could sense unerringly.

Dumfounded, he dropped the screw driver and surveyed the cold, gray bulkheads.

Brad! he thought. It was as though Brad was in the compartment with him! Not physically. But in some inscrutable manner. It was as though he unmistakably sensed the *essence* of the man.

As he stood in the corner, rigid, not breathing, his eyes were again attracted by the needles. They were dipping in another fluctuation. They were beyond their previous low mark! It was apparent they would cover the range in their drop this time. There was smoke coming from the unit!

He closed his eyes and waited.

* * *

SHIVA looked up from his desk, an exuberant smile showing.

"When does the firecracker explode?" he eyed Wellman, seated across from him.

"Right now," Wellman said, looking at his watch.

"Every government—at the same time?"

"Every one. Plus every medium of news dissemination."

"You think they'll listen?"

Wellman leaned back, expanding his chest with a deep breath. "What would you do? Suppose you're the head of a country and the religious leader of almost two hundred million people throughout the world tells you the earth is going to be destroyed within two weeks unless you meet his terms—practically turn your country over to him?"

"At the same time your astronomers verify the fact there has been a change in the course of an approaching comet and collision with earth is inevitable. A large percentage of your country is already Shivaistic. You know that with doom approaching, the majority will turn Shivaistic."

Wellman spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "You wouldn't resist long. I've a suspicion that you'd be among the representatives to attend that—uh, shall we say—surrender conference here next week."

Shiva folded his arms and stared thoughtfully across the room.

"How will the people take it?" he asked.

"Within a week there'll be four hundred million Shivaites. The number should skyrocket addition-

ally during the final week."

Shiva leaned back, contentedly. "Then we have two firecrackers exploding today."

Wellman looked questioningly at him.

"At approximately this minute the X-20 is being swished out of existence."

The attorney raised his eyebrows.

Shiva looked at the clock on the wall. "It's over now," he said with an air of accomplishment.

"When the news gets out," Wellman suggested, "it will be easy to get action through the federal courts—if you let the courts continue operating . . . Incidentally, they're closing the deal on those carriers today."

"Block it."

"But I don't know if I can! It's a private deal!"

"I said *block it!*"

"All right. I'll do it."

"You're damned right you will."

* * *

BRAD raised his head from the desk in time to watch Les materialize in the center of the room. The research director screamed in abject terror and threw both arms over his heavily shadowed face. His stiff, greasy coveralls failed to conceal the trembling of his legs.

For only a second Brad looked indecisively at him . . . If he would only remain frozen in fright and confusion for another few moments!

Closing his eyes again, he sent a perceptive probe leaping back to where the ship sped toward Alpha Centauri. But it was too late to teleport the other two crew members back! His psychic vision enfolded the craft even as it was seized in a tremendous, instantaneous expansion that seemed to increase its size and mass to limits which the entire universe could not contain. Then it was gone, without a trace.

Despondently, Brad rose and walked over to Les, pulled his hands away from his face.

But Les jerked his arms free and backed away, his eyes flashing terror.

"Get away from me, you devil!" His voice was low and hoarse as he cringed in the corner. Once more he clamped hands over his face and shook, sobbing.

"It's not supernatural, Les," Brad attempted to calm him. "There's a logical, scientific explanation. I don't know it all myself, yet. But . . ."

"Mad. That's it! I'm mad!" Les was whispering now. Unexpectedly, he addressed Brad, but his eyes stared dazedly through him. "If I could faint, I'd be out now. But there's some damned thread

of rationality that won't let go . . . Why can't I go completely crazy?" The last was shouted.

Brad reached out for him. But he jerked away again. His flailing arm struck a chair. He grasped it by the back-rest and swung it viciously over his head.

Making no attempt to dodge, Brad stood there pitying the man. The stout legs of the chair crashed down on his head. Splintered wood flew about the room. As the jagged edges of the legs continued downward with the momentum of the swing they ripped the lapel off Brad's coat on one side, tore a strip out on the other.

But he felt no pain. There was no injury.

"*You're not hurt!*" There was even more incredulity in Les' voice—in his expression.

Brad watched his eyes roll back into his head and he caught him as he collapsed.

The door swung open and O'Connor swept in.

"What happened?" he demanded. "I heard a noise. I . . . *Les-ter Roberts!*"

"Everything's all right," Brad shouted angrily. "Get out."

"But Les! I—wasn't he . . ."

"He didn't make the flight."

"But—"

"Get out!"

O'Connor slammed the door behind him.

Brad propped Les in the desk chair and began slapping his face.

"The X-20's six minutes overdue on its last report," the intercom announced.

"Six minutes," Brad acknowledged automatically, snapping the instrument off.

A MINUTE later Les came to. It was apparent he was in better control of himself. But his eyes were still dazed as he regarded Brad in what must have been a forced stare.

"Don't try thinking," Brad advised. "Just listen. At least it can't seem as irrational as what just happened. But what I'm going to say can't be repeated—I wouldn't be telling you if this hadn't happened. Nobody must know about me until the stars belong to the race."

"I knew there was something supernatural about you," Les muttered absently, "when I found out . . ."

"Not supernatural," Brad corrected. "Superhuman at the most."

" . . . when I found out it wasn't your father who ran your enterprises before you arrived on the scene, but you in disguise—in a disguise that made you look twice your age."

"The story starts," Brad continued, "a hundred and forty-six years ago with two small boys, a squirrel and a dog in the woods.

At least, I thought it started there. Now, since the rock experiment failed, I'm not so sure . . . "

Twenty minutes later he finished talking. Les' face was still blank. There were no questions. There would be—later, after the shock wore off, Brad knew.

He slapped Les' shoulder. "Now go to your quarters and get some rest."

Les said nothing as he stumbled from the room.

Ten minutes later Carol returned.

"The ship's lost but Les is all right," he said abruptly. "We got the wrong information from the Station. He changed his mind at the last minute; didn't make the trip."

Relief flooded over her face. But was there as much relief as he had expected?

"Thank God," she said.

But there was no smile. Again her features became an interlocking maze of taut lines.

"The comet's going to hit earth!" she announced, breathlessly.

"What!"

"In two weeks! It changed course. Shiva said he caused it. Astronomers have already verified it's going to hit."

"And Shiva announced he would save the world if it turned to him?"

"If all governments recognize him as supreme authority over

earth, with unrestricted control over all countries . . . He's going to have all the heads of state come to him for a conference—a surrender conference."

It was apparent she was dazed. She was staring through him.

He grasped her shoulders. "It won't happen," he promised. "The comet won't hit and Shiva won't have the earth."

She looked into his eyes and her brows twitched as though she was striving for comprehension. "I think I believe you, Brad," she said.

They were both silent.

"Brad," she said absently.

"Yes?"

"Brad, I . . . "

"What is it, Carol?"

"Nothing . . . It wasn't anything important."

CHAPTER VIII

LOOK at them out there." Hartley stood at the window cleaning his fingernails with a pocket knife. "If it weren't for the troops around the landing field they'd rush this lab too."

"Why shouldn't they?" Brad asked sullenly. "They didn't spare the other six labs."

"I understand our people have had it plenty tough at all those installations."

Brad nodded.

"Total losses?"

"All of them, from the reports we've received."

"Why, Brad?" Hartley seemed confused. "Why are they attacking the laboratories?"

"Look at that mob, Ray." He pointed. "They look like normal people. I guess most of them were, until three days ago—when a fanatic cult leader *and* their scientists told them their world was going to be destroyed. Their scientists said nothing at all could be done. The leader of the cult promised salvation—offered them their only hope. Now they are Shivaites, perhaps in a desperate sense, but still Shivaites."

Hartley was still confused. "And he wants your laboratories destroyed?"

"He's indicated science must go. Perhaps he's even passed the order around without giving publicity to it."

"Yeah," Hartley mused, "I remember that pronunciation: 'There must be a total return to religion; humanity must abandon the worldly'."

Brad watched a score of State Guard troops, wielding gas guns, advance on a mob that was congregating on the northwest edge of the field. They gave way before the uniformed men. The threat, over, the troops extended the perimeter of their protective ring.

"Think they'll let up enough to give us a chance to dismantle the ships and transport them to the carriers?" Hartley asked.

"We're out of luck on the carriers too," Brad said glumly. "The deal is off. The government's holding them in a standby status, with the rest of the obsolete fleet units. I guess they figure they might need all available equipment within the next few days."

Hartley swore.

"At least," Brad rationalized aloud, "we were lucky enough to get our platform crew down."

"I don't call that luck," Hartley said acidly. "It would have been better if they'd stayed up there . . . Then Munstaff wouldn't have been able to spout off about the lost flight. That's responsible for some of those people being out there. It partly justified the cult's reasoning that such experiments were too dangerous."

Both men were silent for a moment. Then Hartley swore again, ramming his fist into his palm.

"Damn!" he exclaimed through clenched teeth. "Why don't they blast him out of that temple? Why . . ."

"The answer to that one," said a voice behind them, "has been provided by all the news services." Brad turned to face O'Connor.

"If you kept up with the news,"

the secretary closed the door behind him, "you'd know the main temple's been under attack all day by fleets of aircraft. But he's got some kind of gimmick that keeps the bombs from hitting."

"Sounds supernatural," Hartley suggested, only half jestingly.

"Most observers claim it is," O'Connor offered. "They say there's an invisible, impregnable dome surrounding the temple."

"When did he perform *this* miracle?" Hartley asked.

"Supposedly yesterday," O'Connor moved back to the door. "They say an attempt was made at assassination on the temple steps. Somebody emptied a pocket machine gun at him from a range of five feet."

"Five feet!" Hartley started.

"Five feet . . . but he wasn't hurt." O'Connor returned to the outer office.

For a long while Brad and Hartley stood in silence at the window, watching the deepening twilight. Floodlights went on around the field and around the cluster of laboratory buildings. Camp fires sprang into flickering existence among the throngs that waited impatiently outside the ring of uniformed men.

He was caught in the middle of an assortment of ironic contrasts, Brad thought. There were the floodlights and the rockets on the

one side, and the primitive campfires on the other. And there were the buildings dedicated to scientific advancement, permeated with the essence of hope and achievement—lined up against the aura of hate and intended destruction that squatted around the fires, waiting for the moment when it could engulf that which was so flimsily protected.

"There it is, Brad," Hartley pointed to the east.

Green like a brilliant emerald, shining like an evil leopard's eye in a dimly lighted jungle, the Fist of Shiva hung low on the horizon. It was not a pinpoint of light, as it had been on the night before. Now it was a small, well-defined disk.

Brad turned back to watch the mob. They were no longer ringed around their fires. Now they were standing, almost without exception—standing and staring at the comet.

LES made the connection between the two units in his private laboratory and raised the camouflaged receiver to his ear.

"You're ten minutes late," the voice said immediately.

"I couldn't break away to make contact," he explained.

"What about the complete report on that test flight? You promised it for yesterday."

"I've been correlating all the

material . . . And I still haven't decided whether I'll turn it in."

The voice spluttered angrily. "You've got to turn it in! So help me, if you refuse you'll regret it for the rest of your life!"

"Which might not be too long," Les laughed dryly.

"Why did you change your mind about making the flight at the last minute?"

"If you get the report, that'll be in it."

A terse, vulgar word exploded through the wire. "You've got to cooperate! Are you insane? Don't you realize . . . Who was the third man aboard? Why are there conflicting reports? What happened? How far did the ship get?"

"Look," Les exclaimed impatiently. "I'm as confused as hell on this whole thing. Actually, there was a point where I almost went insane on it. But I do know this much . . . Darson's okay. He's trying to do more for the human race than has ever been done before by any ten men. It's a completely altruistic expression! Perhaps I'll actually go crazy before it's over. But I think I'm doing the right thing by switching loyalty."

"What the hell difference does all that make now? Don't you know Darson's through? That every move he's tried has been blocked?"

"Then it's all over, as far as you're concerned," Les shrugged inwardly. "Why bother about a final report then?—Anyway, you have other sources."

"But none as close as you."

Les was thoughtfully silent. Only the hum of the carrier signal came through the wire.

Finally, the person on the other end of the wireless connection spoke:

"Until now my threats have seemed rather watery. I'm sure you'll think the one you're about to hear isn't . . . If I don't get that report within an hour I'll expose you to Darson."

Les' shoulders sagged hopelessly. What difference would one more betrayal make to Brad? Only a handful of words would satisfy his other obligation. Then, since there would be nothing more to report on, he could completely sever the connection. Then he could devote his entire time to helping Brad in any way he was able . . . Anyway, he could not conceive of how the complete information would injure Darson's cause.

"The flight, even considering the loss of the ship and two lives," he began, "was a complete success. Darson has achieved his goal of perfecting interstellar flight for the masses. In his struggle toward another achievement—one also intended to benefit humanity



—he has run into an obstacle. But I have an idea he will surmount it too. You see . . . ”

* * *

CAROL left the laboratory work bench and checked to make

certain she had locked the door. There was practically no chance that anyone would be passing in the lower level corridor this late at night. But she did not want to be discovered.

Reassured, she returned to the bench and turned up the spear of flame under the glowing bit of irregular metal.

It was white hot now. She backed away, wondering whether it was her imagination that was suggesting the mass was giving off even more heat than it had absorbed.

Eagerly, she removed her clothing, placing the articles neatly across the back of a chair while she watched the metal fragment attain an even more brilliant degree of incandescence.

Then she returned to the apparatus and extinguished the flame beneath the lump. Drawing closer, she let the heat from the glowing metal caress her body. She stooped so its rays could fall on her face, her shoulders. Raising her arms over her head, she turned around slowly and exposed her back to the warmth. She extended her arms and let the shimmering light play across her hands, her forearms, her biceps. Stretching upward on her toes, she felt the heat fall upon her thighs, her knees.

It was a pleasant warmth, a soothing sensation that seemed to

flow in through her skin and permeate the most inward parts of her body—comfortingly, invigoratingly.

Until the incandescence disappeared, she remained before the bench. Then she dressed herself quickly, as though, with a sudden sense of modesty, she had become aware of the impropriety.

Hesitatingly, she looked at the bare wall at the other end of the long laboratory room. Then, tensing, she closed her eyes.

Abruptly, she disappeared and materialized at the other end of the room. Repeating the process in reverse, she teleported back to the bench. For a moment her features were strained with indecision. Then again she disappeared, leaving the room empty. She was gone for not more than a minute.

But when she returned there were glistening snowflakes clinging to her blonde hair and lying on her shoulders. She shuddered with cold and felt her damp feet, still encrusted with snow.

There was surprise on her face, but only for a moment. It faded quickly as deep lines of concern moved in on her forehead. And suddenly she shivered once more. It was not caused by the cold to which she had subjected herself when she had teleported to and walked through the shimmering but normally invisible dome

that surrounded Laboratory D, then teleported four thousand miles to the polar region. The reaction was the result of fright.

A grim terror crept slowly over her and she bit her lips to keep them from trembling.

* * *

“WHY didn’t you report this before?” Shiva sat tensely before the communication unit on his desk.

“I didn’t think it was important,” came the voice from the speaker. “I was only mentioning it casually just then.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure she’s in love with him.”

“But, is *he* in love with *her*?”

“I rather imagine so.”

“What proof do you have?”

Laughter. “After all, I’m in a good position to observe these things.”

“How much does he love her?”

“Enough to try to convince her she’d be happier with another man because he thinks he isn’t good enough for her.”

“I think I understand . . . How does she react to this, this attempted sacrifice on his part?”

“She shows a good bit of reserve over the matter. I am not sure of the reason for that. Perhaps it’s because she resents the at-

tempted sacrifice."

Shiva drummed the desk with his fingers. "So he doesn't think he's good enough." He laughed sardonically.

"Apparently not . . . He once told his chief research director that he, the director, was a more normal human and deserved the girl more. But I didn't think you'd want to know about things like that. As long as we do our job here and . . ."

"Yes, I want to know about it—all about it!" Shiva slapped the desk with his hand.

"Well here's something else . . . Remember when you got the report Darson *disappeared* from his office—the day the comet prediction was verified? Well, she was in the office at the time and . . ."

"What! And she didn't say anything about it to anyone?"

"To no one. She entered about a half hour before he disappeared and didn't come out until after it happened. She was hiding in the lavatory."

Shiva leaned back and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"Through with me yet?" The question came out of the speaker.

"Not yet. Stand by. I'm deciding on something."

Again he turned to his thoughts. Brad Darson—Clark Granet—in love! He laughed. Until now he had been sure that the only things

his brother regarded affectionately were science, research, laboratory buildings and rockets. But now it was something else. Something irreplaceable . . . Darson couldn't be hurt—physically. But, Shiva nodded appreciatively, there were other ways of bringing pain—deeper pain—than through bodily injury.

"Green," he called into the communication unit.

"Yes."

"You've got to get her outside."

"Outside?"

"Outside the reservation—outside the laboratory area. You'll have to decide how you can trick her into leaving. Perhaps you can say he's waiting out there. And I'll have to know the instant she is clear of the—laboratory area."

"How'll I do that?"

"Get one of the others to cooperate with you. Have him watch while you escort her outside. Then he'll be able to report when it's accomplished."

"But I don't understand."

"I have to get her here—in the temple. But all you have to concern yourself with is getting her away from the reservation. The rest will be taken care of."

"It might not be easy. It might take a day or two before the opportunity presents itself."

"Not more than two days!" It was a command.

CHAPTER IX

"IT'S down, I tell you!" The excited voice barked violently in the receiver on Brad's desk. "It exploded and fell not a half hour ago!"

"How'd you find out?" Brad leaned closer to the communication unit.

"We've been tracking it on radar ever since we took the crew off three days ago."

Carol gripped his arm. "What is it, Brad?"

"Space Station," he said without looking around. Then he continued talking into the apparatus. "Where'd it fall?"

"In the Atlantic. No harm done. We started to notify you as soon as it exploded and began falling. But we were too busy calculating trajectory so we could get out warnings. Whatever hit it stopped its orbital speed completely."

"The ships?"

"They're all okay. They were in orbit five hundred miles farther out and in opposition with the Station."

The informant was silent momentarily. Only his heavy breathing rasped in the speaker.

Brad cursed himself, realizing now the incaution he had displayed by thoughtlessly dropping the shield around the Station when he

removed the crew. The ships would have been down too, he knew, if he had made the mistake of discontinuing their shield.

Carol walked absently to the window and looked out. Below, a truck coasted down the exit ramp and headed across the lawn for the far corner of the wire-enclosed reservation. The driver seemed to be in a hurry. There was a single-crate load on the platform that bounced as the truck rolled.

Suddenly she started.

"When did it fall?" Brad's voice rose again.

"A half hour ago, like I said. It was at about the same time that Nanking was being destroyed—just before Sydney was razed."

"Okay," Brad sighed. "Alert the coast crew and tell them to see if anything can be salvaged—if any of the 'chutes worked."

"Bowers already tried to reach the boys on the beach. It seems you don't have a beach crew any longer—they went home to their families."

Brad shut off the communicator.

Carol watched the man park the truck in the corner of the field and walk back toward the building. He was too far away for her to recognize him.

"What are you looking at?"

Brad asked.

"Nothing . . . Shiva still destroying cities?" She returned to the

desk.

"If we can take his word for it," Brad looked down at his hands, "he's through now. Sydney was supposed to be the last to go."

"That made seven, didn't it?"

"Seven," he nodded. "I guess the destruction was spectacular enough to convince the governments of those countries they have no choice other than to be represented at the temple conference tomorrow."

A SHORT man in a black rubberoid apron entered. He held a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Your secretary wasn't there to announce me," he said apologetically, "so I just came busting in."

"What is it, Summers?"

"You still interested in Report No. A-1327?"

"At a time like this? You are kidding, of course."

Summers shrugged, wadded up the paper and threw it in the waste basket. "Just thought you might be waiting for it. It was due about a week ago." He turned and reached for the knob.

Brad looked up. "What was it on?"

"That chunk of metal you sent down for analysis. It was assigned to Garfield. But he walked off the job the next day. We found it in his desk, together with the

order, and I put it through the works this morning."

"Forget it," Brad said. "It's not important any more."

"Maybe we'd better find out what it was," Carol suggested. "Summers," she called; "what did the test show?"

The man laughed. "Permolite—we figured you were playing some kind of joke on us, chief."

"Permolite!" Brad lurched up. "You mean . . . ?"

"Sure. The same stuff the skin of your ships and the Space Station is made of."

"But—but," Brad sputtered, "that's impossible! I perfected that alloy myself only eight years ago!"

"You thought it was something else?"

Brad scratched the back of his neck. "Something at least a few hundred years old."

Summers laughed again. "Then the joke's on you."

Brad brushed past him and strode down the hall.

Carol followed. "Where are you going?"

"To storage. Come on."

"But, Brad . . ."

"No time to explain now."

They stepped into the elevator.

In the storage sub-level he raced to the bank of crated air restorers. Abruptly, he stopped and counted them.

"Eleven!" he exclaimed.

Then he quickly inspected the sides of each one.

"It's gone!" he shouted.

IN a corner room on the seventh floor of Laboratory D, a thin man, his actions erratic and uneasy, bolted the door and reached into a cluttered corner of a metal wall closet. His hand withdrew a small box with a grid in one end. He snapped a switch on the other end.

He waited a few moments, then he spoke into the box in a whisper.

"Shiva!"

"Yes?" The answer came from the louvered metal object.

"This is Green . . . It's done!"

"What?"

"The rock. You were right. There was more to it!"

"There is! Where . . . Now listen . . ."

"I don't need any instructions. I tell you it's all done. I remembered that on the day he came back with the specimen he was damned particular about a shipment of material coming in from another laboratory. I checked the equipment a few minutes ago. The rock was there!"

"Where is it now?"

"I had to act quickly. Darson was occupied and the rest of his staff had their hands full. I got

a truck and transported the crate to where you said—the northwest corner of the reservation—just inside the wire fence. I left it there in the truck just a few minutes ago. Had to pass his office window, but I'm sure he didn't see me . . . I didn't have time to camouflage it, so there's still a chance he might spot the box out there. I hope you've got things set up so you can get it away quickly."

There was a smile of accomplishment on the man's face. It was highlighted by rays from the setting sun that slanted in through the window and turned his eyeglasses into two eerie disks of sparkling illumination. He listened to instructions.

"Stay there," he was told. "I'll be with you in about five minutes."

SHIVA, trembling with anxiety, leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Excited as he was, it was difficult to concentrate. But he forced himself to constrain his anticipation while he hurled out a perceptive probe.

The great silver dome loomed in the center of his psychic vision. Clustered around it were hundreds of civilians. Between them and the dome were troops. At four equally spaced points along the perimeter of the scintillating hemisphere, right angles of a barbed wire fence protruded. The straight

lines of the fence were concealed by the dome.

He narrowed his vision to include only the northwest corner. The truck was parked there. He looked on its platform. There was no crate! He looked under the vehicle and around it, but did not see what he sought. Hastily, he inspected the other three corners . . . Nothing!

In his office, Shiva snapped up-right.

"You lied!" he shouted into the communicator. "It's not there!"

"But that's impossible! I just put it there! *Nobody* could have had time to move it. I still have the keys to the truck . . . Wait, I'll look out the window."

Shiva waited.

"The truck's there!" Green shouted presently. "But the crate's gone!"

"You failed, Green," Shiva said in a low, accusing voice. "You know what that means?"

"Wait! I tried my best!"

"*Do you know what that means?*"

"The girl—she might have noticed!"

"You failed on her too."

"I'll get her out there," Green blurted. "I'll get her out there *today!*"

"You were supposed to get her out by yesterday."

"Today! It'll be today!"

"Find that rock! Get that girl!"

Angrily, Shiva slammed the "off" switch down on the communicator.

"Wellman!" He shouted commandingly.

"Yes," the attorney entered from the anteroom.

"I want Laboratory D destroyed! Now!"

"Any particular way?"

"Have the temples nearest the scene flood that mob around the laboratory with the most fanatic members of their congregations. Instruct each priest that his temple will be destroyed, and him with it, if Laboratory D isn't a shambles by tomorrow night. I'll get in there if I have to have every technician killed! By tomorrow night I don't want anything left that Darson would think worth protecting."

"The troops? There isn't any time left to fix their withdrawal with the government."

"We'll own the troops by tomorrow afternoon. If we don't, to hell with them . . . Just get enough Shivaites there to surge in over their bodies!"

* * *

A LIMP hand against his forehead, Brad leaned back listlessly against a crate.

"Shiva!" he whispered. "He got

it!"

Carol shifted uneasily, looked away from his eyes.

"How did he know it was here?" His voice was still low, incredulous. "How did he arrange the substitution? How did he get it out when he learned what it was?"

"There must be others like Chet—in Lab D," Carol suggested hesitatingly.

"But only Les knew I brought it here."

"Others *must* have been in on it. Otherwise, how else could you have gotten it in here?"

"The loyalty of the men who brought it up can't be questioned," he continued thoughtfully. "Besides, only they and Les knew where it came from. There was no way Shiva could have guessed its significance! Only those three men had the information to betray me . . . those three men and—you."

"What is its significance, Brad?" Carol asked uneasily.

"You!" he repeated, his face reflecting confusion. "Those three men and you were the only ones!"

"Brad," she backed away. "You don't think I . . ."

His eyes focused on infinity as his thoughts went back to the day he had ineffectively fought the inexorable advance of the Fist of Shiva. His superconscious had returned to his office and he had

paced the floor there a few minutes before teleporting to the site of the temple. Now he recalled the toe of his shoe coming in contact with a note pad, sliding it under the desk . . . It had been Carol's pad! Why had it been on the floor? Had she dropped it at a moment of surprise—perhaps over seeing his torporific form in the chair?

"You saw it!" he said accusingly. "You dropped your note pad when you saw me in the chair! Then you left without saying anything to anyone. And you hid your surprise expertly!"

"I—I don't know what . . ."

He stared piercingly into her eyes. It was there! It was all there—the guilt, the deceit, the cunning. She was one of them!

Brad fell back against the crate, stunned.

"You—a Shivaite! And to think that all the time I trusted you—more than anyone else in the entire organization. Even more than Les!"

The cunning left her eyes and for a moment he thought there was pity in them. The impression only spawned rage in his chest. He tightened his fists and his features became rigid with scorn.

"And to think I actually fell in love with you!" The words were bitter. "I loved you enough to sacrifice you to another man be-

cause you could never be happy with me—not for more than a few years.”

She smiled broadly. Was she ridiculing him? Was she blatantly expressing her derision?

“Carol!” he shouted, anger again surging within him. “Why did you do it?”

She advanced and placed a hand on his trembling arm. “I could never be happy with you, Brad? Not for more than a few years?—Come with me, to my laboratory.”

She backed away.

Then she disappeared.

IT was as though a lethal bolt of psychokinetic energy had seared his mind.

Paralyzed, not breathing, Brad was staring at the spot where Carol had stood smiling unaccountably, even appearing alluring despite his new-found hate.

Then she had disappeared! She had dematerialized, just like . . . She had said, “Come to my laboratory.” She had *teleported* to her laboratory!

But it was impossible!—Unless it was a trick . . . That was it, he assured himself. It was a trick. She had had access to the meteorite! She had exposed herself to its incandescent glow! *Then it had worked!* His hypothesis had been correct!

Whether it was a trick or not,

he must follow.

In her laboratory, he whirled around. She was behind him.

“What . . . ?” he began.

But then his eyes focused on the crate behind her—the one with the red lettering. He attacked the wing-nuts on its lid.

“The rock’s in there,” Carol said, still smiling. “When you were talking with radar I watched a truck drive it toward the edge of the dome. I couldn’t see who was driving it. But at least I was able to teleport it back up here before the truck went through the dome.”

Bewildered, he snatched off the lid and stared at the meteorite.

“But—but, I . . .” Confusion had paralyzed his throat. Was she *actually* on his side after all?

“It won’t take long to tell my story, Clark Granet,” she said.

Another bolt of bewilderment rammed into his conscious.

“You—you know me?”

“Yes.” Again she was smiling mystically. “And you should know *me* too. Perhaps you would—if I hadn’t dyed my hair and altered my appearance . . . for the sixth time, incidentally.”

“Who . . . ?”

“You once told me you didn’t want to take a scholarship to the university because ‘a lot can happen in four years; people you know can get married, for one thing.’

And I believe I said, 'I don't think a girl ought to get married before she's twenty-one.' At that time I didn't realize I meant before she's a hundred and twenty-one."

"*Elaine!*" he gasped. "*Elaine Barrow!*"

"YES, Clark. I'm like you. I didn't know we were similar until I recognized you accidentally four years ago. Even then I would have thought that the resemblance was just a coincidence. But then, there was another person who resembled someone else I once knew—Shiva—Russell Granet. The double coincidence couldn't be ignored.

"I joined your staff—as a spy. You were right when you suspected that much. But I was spying only for myself. I wanted to know why I could extend my vision anywhere in the world; why I could teleport for short distances—even as far as fifty feet; why I was growing old at the rate of about one year every twenty-five years; why I had to live in one place ten or fifteen years, then move on, changing my name and appearance so people wouldn't begin to suspect.

"Then this Shiva burst on the scene a generation ago. And, in the past few years, he started boasting of immortality, not trying to hide it. Then I found you.

"If I was to learn all the answers, it would have to be undercover and either from you or Russell. Both of you had apparently accepted your superhuman aspects and abilities and had settled down in some sort of definite plan.

"But I couldn't let you know who I was. How could I know that both of you weren't being motivated by ulterior purposes? It was even possible you were working together in a camouflaged threat over the rest of the race... At that time I had no conception of the tremendous power you both possessed.

"I considered the possibility you were working together even more seriously when I watched you teleport to the edge of the dome surrounding Russell's temple and go in for a talk with him.

"But I was really confused when I looked in on his displays of destructive powers and your ability to teleport yourself and other objects inconceivable distances. It was doubtless that both your powers were equal. And in many ways I was like you and your brother. But why was there the difference?—I had no power, no destructive power, at all.

"It was when you brought up the meteorite that I learned *why!* When I saw the sample and location of the thing, I remembered... I remembered a scene of two boys

running through the woods; a dog following close by; a flaming meteor crashing down; the boys cringing from the heat of the thing.

"You see, Clark, I was in that picture too. But I was so far behind the boys, not wanting them to see me following, that I felt little heat from the object.

"When I saw the setup you were going to use to experiment with the specimen from the meteorite, I guessed that rays from the incandescent glow of the thing were what would do the trick. I experimented to make certain. I was right. After the test I was able to teleport great distances. But still I had only little assault power. I guess it takes considerable exposure to increase that . . . It's not that I want power—I don't. I don't even want the ability to teleport or see without looking. It would have been better, even, if none of us had enjoyed any unnatural longevity at all."

BRAD was reeling under the effects of the disclosures. "And you didn't tell me about it?"

"I couldn't—not until I was sure that you weren't actually aligned with Russell, or that you weren't out for some sort of world control yourself. Not until I was sure I wouldn't be locking myself up in an execution chamber by letting myself be known.

"I would have told you several days ago, as I said. But watching you go to Russell confused the entire issue. But I didn't give up hopes then—or even abandon my 'spying.' I even obtained your specimen of the rock and ran it through a metallurgical test to find out why it didn't work for you. That was why I was so anxious a few minutes ago for you to hear out Summers on his report. Again I was becoming convinced that the entire series of events wasn't a scheme by you and your brother.

"You see, before then I suspected that even if you weren't aligned with Russell, you wanted the rock as a means of making yourself more powerful than him and usurping his dominant position. If that were the case, then I would be caught in the middle of a power squeeze and would be asking for elimination. You see, I can't control comets and raze cities and hurl bolts of destruction. I can't even erect domes that thought stuff can't go through—or other domes invulnerable to bombs."

"Elaine Barrow," he murmured. Trembling, he took her hand.

Then she was crying. Her throat convulsed with deep sobs and she shut her eyes to hold back the tears. Trying to hide her face, she came to him and pressed her cheek against his chest, clinging desperately to him.

"It's just a reaction," she explained bravely.

He held her around the waist. "Go ahead and cry it out."

"Oh, Clark," she cried. "It's been torture—the nostalgia that stayed for a century; then finding someone like myself and having to work against him . . . And now—this—the chaos, the comet!"

He held her close. "It'll be all right now, having the meteorite and being able to experiment with it. I'll get more power! Additional exposure is bound to result in more power. Then his shields won't stop me . . . But we've got to find out who has been working against us in the laboratory. We can't let *anyone* know about the rock . . . If only we knew who brought it outside the shield!"

She used his handkerchief to dry her cheeks. "I'm sorry. I failed on that. It would have been simple to use the power to look into the truck and see who it was at the wheel, but I guess I was too elated to think of doing it . . . too elated in realizing that since you were actually being sabotaged by Russell's agent, it was even less probable that you were working *with* him."

"Mr. Darson . . . Mr. Darson . . . Mr. Darson." It was the public address system in the corridor.

He went out the laboratory and to the nearest hallway responder

box. "This is Darson."

"Mr. Darson," O'Connor's voice was almost shaking, "the troops have invaded the building!"

"I'll be right down."

CAROL followed Brad into his office. An Army officer sat at his desk.

"I'm General Lampson, US Army. We've superseded the state troops here."

Brad looked suspiciously at the two sergeants on either side of the desk.

"You have the necessary legal documents to show your authority?" he asked.

"Hell, man," the general replied irritably, "I don't need any documents. What's going on all over the world isn't a Sunday school picnic . . . Can you fly one of those crates of yours?"

"No," Brad lied. "I hire men to do that."

"That doesn't quite correspond with previous information we've been given . . . Sergeant." Lampson nodded to the man on his right.

The non-commissioned officer sprang around the desk. Before Brad could move he clamped handcuffs on his wrists.

"We've already taken into custody four of your employees." The general glanced at notations on the desk pad. "They are Les-

ter Roberts, David Schoneman, Herve Masters and Cyril Pane. They will be held on a standby basis to fly four of those ships on the field. You will fly the fifth at our direction . . . Sergeant, take him to confinement."

"Brad!" Carol raced to him.

"Don't worry." He winked as the sergeant led him out the door. "I'll see you soon."

CHAPTER X

O'CONNOR squirmed uneasily in the leather waiting chair in the outer office.

Carol, seated beside him, studied his face as he stared across the room at the colonel who occupied his desk. The secretary's thin form was rigid with unspoken protest.

He leaned toward the girl. "Do you suppose they're really acting under government orders?" he asked. "Or are they taking over so they can use the ships personally?"

"I can't see that it makes any difference."

There was indecision on his face. "Miss Sanders; I'm afraid there can't be any safety for us here now. Again I ask, won't you let me try to get you off this reservation? If the mob out there gets enough courage to attack the troops, there may be a good deal of trouble. I'm sure Mr. Darson

would feel easier if he knew you were away from here entirely."

Inattentively, she shook her head.

O'Connor sighed impatiently and reached to the vacant seat on the other side of him. He got a small, louvered box and placed it on his lap.

"What's that?" Carol showed interest.

"Mr. Tatum put it together for me in the radio lab so I could keep track of what happens outside now that our communication channels are down . . . It picks up audio signals from the commercial stations."

He turned on the set and rotated its only dial.

Carol cupped her chin in her hand and closed her eyes.

Brad, she thought, *can you hear me?*

The answer came immediately, *Yes, Carol.*

What's happened? Why . . . ?

I'm all right. I'm in a sixth floor room with Les and the two pilots.

They can't hold you!

Of course not. But I've got to wait until I can escape by normal means. If they get the impression I used supernatural force I'd never be Mr. Darson again.

Oh.

I've already transported the rock out of the laboratory. It's in the woods. As soon as I can get

free we'll go there.

No more impressions came from him.

The colonel went into the inner office and closed the door.

Sounds began issuing from the speaker of the box O'Connor held. . . . tumultuous roaring, the muffled hissing of a nuclojet's engines. The sound intensity diminished and an announcer's voice broke in:

"These are scenes of the final stages in the destruction by Shiva fire of the city of New York. No comment is necessary."

Carol was glad the little box couldn't bring in the picture too. It wouldn't be nice to look at.

Again only riotous sound crackled from the speaker. After almost a minute, it faded abruptly.

"And now," the announcer began once more, "the Presidential Mansion—where President Lindarn has just announced the United States will be represented at the Central Temple conference tomorrow. The announcement followed by less than an hour the disclosure by Argentina that it, too, would send its chief of state. Argentina was the second to last nation to submit to the demand for a world meeting. . . ."

Sound welled in the audio receiver—angry shouts, shrill whistles, the bark of gunfire.

The noise attained stentorian proportions.

Carol stiffened. . . . Not all the sound was coming from the receiver. There were other whistles lusty shouts, more gunfire—outside the laboratory building.

The inner office door burst open and General Lampson, followed by the colonel, raced into the corridor, their sidearms drawn.

Carol rushed to the window. A hundred spotlights, casting their swinging rays from atop every building, illuminated the field around the laboratory enclosure.

A score of rapid-fire gun emplacements spat ferocious streaks of blazing lead toward the wire fence—breached in a dozen places. The hundreds of attackers who spilled through the gaps returned even more gunfire than was being hurled at them.

"It's too late, Miss Sanders," O'Connor reproved in a trembling voice. "I told you: you should have let me take you outside."

Clinging to the now silent receiver, he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. His trembling hand dislodged his eyeglasses. They clung to one ear for a moment, then fell to the floor, shattering. But he made no attempt to retrieve them.

Carol watched the masses sweep over the gun positions and race for the buildings. Most of the lights were out now. But still the scurrying figures were easily dis-

cernible in the weird green illumination that shone down from the Fist of Shiva, almost overhead, larger than anything in the night sky except the moon.

"BRAD," Les whispered, "if you've found the rock and if you can use it to make yourself stronger than that damned comet-hurler, let's get the hell out of here!"

"As soon as . . ."

"I know! As soon as that conference is finished in the hallway so you'll have a chance to break the door down. What difference does it make if we just disappear? To hell with considering the future . . . There might not be one!"

Brad looked at the three pilots who stood by the window watching the restless crowd in the field. Then he closed his eyes. "It won't be long. They're getting ready to break up in the hall now."

"But what if they leave a guard out there?"

"I'll find a way to attract him down to the other end of the hall."

"I don't like it. Carol . . ."

"She can take care of herself."

"Since you told me she's like you, I don't doubt that at all. But she's just a girl. She still doesn't know all the tricks you know."

Brad laughed.

"She can be hurt, can't she?" Les persisted. "And you've admitted there are still Shiva spies in the laboratory. Suppose . . ."

Brad frowned suddenly. "All right . . . Let's get to work."

The night air outside was suddenly a sea of riotous sound. Gunfire drowned it out.

"They're attacking!" Les shouted.

Brad turned abruptly toward the window, his eyes focused on the three pilots.

The trio disappeared.

Even before he heard Les' gasp, he explained, "I sent them out near the road where they'll be safe."

He turned, faced his research director and closed his eyes in concentration. When he opened them he said, "O'Connor was with her. I teleported both of them out in the woods with the rock... Let's go."

THEY materialized in front of Carol, who was looking helplessly at O'Connor. The secretary, his eyes casting frighteningly around him, was backing away from the girl and the large, pitted mass of metal.

"You should have left him there," Les suggested. "Looks like he isn't going to be easy to handle."

"He'll snap out of it, I hope

... O'Connor! Don't be frightened. I . . . "

"You're like Shiva!" the secretary gasped, still clinging to his receiver. "You can do miracles too!"

It might not be as bad as he imagined it would, Brad thought. "Yes, I'm like Shiva. So is Carol Sanders." He took her hand. "But it's all a rational process. And . . . "

Les stepped between the two men. "You get on with what you have to do, chief. I'll take care of him . . . You see, O'Connor, it's this way . . . "

Brad and Carol went over to the rock. For a moment he stood before it, staring intently at its charred and rough surface. It cast a double shadow on the ground on either side—one, its silhouette thrown by the bright light of a gibbous moon, the other, a well-defined outline etched by the almost equally bright comet-shine.

"If only I had time to experiment," he said regretfully. "For almost thirty years I've dreamed of placing a subject before its heat—a human subject! Of seeing . . . "

"But you're already certain!" Carol objected. "You, me, Russell . . . And I went before it a second time."

"All I want is a chance to find out if the power it gives can be

utilized immediately . . . if, when a person is placed before its intense glow, he can at once have the benefit of protracted vision, teleportation, telekinesis, psychokinetic action. Or whether there must be a long period before the power coalesces within an individual; before he can use it.

"You see, it took us—Russell and me—years before we achieved full use of the power. But I feel that was because we didn't suspect it was there and had to wait until we accidentally discovered its various effects. On the other hand, if a person is subjected to the experiment, and told that he can teleport himself, will he be able to do so immediately?"

Les walked out into the clearing. "Sounds like an interesting test. I'll be your subject. O'Connor can stand his bewilderment a little longer."

"Thanks," Brad acknowledged, "but I'd rather do the ground work with someone a bit less valuable."

"It can't be dangerous," Carol suggested. "It didn't hurt us. It didn't hurt me the second time."

Brad paused indecisively. "Okay, Les," he said finally. "You're covered." He turned toward the rock.

But Carol caught his arm. "Can we risk the loss of time?"

"We're not risking anything. I can expose myself at the same

time that I learn what I want to know."

"Then," Les reminded, "all you have to do is find a way to heat that thing up." He pointed to the meteorite.

Without answering, Brad stared at one edge of the mass. An intense aura engulfed one of the larger protuberances and the clearing was suddenly illuminated by the fire-like manifestation.

But it was extinguished abruptly as Brad looked around. "Where's O'Connor?" he asked.

Les surveyed the clearing. "The last I saw of him he was following me back here, still clutching that little black box."

"Box? What box?"

"An audio receiver," Carol explained. "He's been listening to telecasts with it. Said Tatum made it so he could follow world events after we lost contact with our outside sources."

"Tatum!" Brad snapped. "Tatum was transferred to Lab A over a month ago!"

Les swore, spun around.

But O'Connor was nowhere in sight.

* * *

"SPEAK louder, Green," Shiva instructed over the communicator. "I can hardly hear you."

"I can't speak any louder," the

whispered voice disclosed. "I can be overheard."

"Where are you?"

"Somewhere in the woods — a few miles south of Laboratory D, I believe. There's a mountain range . . ."

"What! What are you doing?"

"I have the rock! I have the girl!"

Shiva gripped the corner of his desk. His hands were white, the skin taut. "I'll tell you how you can help me get a fix on your location. All you have to . . ."

"You didn't tell me he was like you," Green said bitterly.

"That's not important now. Concentrate on . . ."

"But it is important. He can kill me any second. You should have warned . . ."

"Look, you've got to think!"

"You didn't tell me the girl was like you too. Did you know that? Were you holding that from me too?"

Breathless, his pulse pounding, Shiva clutched the robes in a tight wad in front of his chest. "The—girl—too?"

"Now that I know he's like you," Green continued, "I can understand why you fought him so much. You knew what he was but you were afraid to try to get him out of the way because he has as much power as you . . . So you hired us to nip at the heels of

Goliath, so you wouldn't get hurt." There was acid in his voice. "I'm through. You can get yourself another sucker!"

"Green," Shiva was unconcerned with the other's emotions. "Are you sure she's like him?"

"You know she is. A person with that kind of power couldn't exist in the same world without everybody else with the same power knowing about it . . . And to think I've been playing with a double-dose of hellfire!"

"You can't quit, Green!" Shiva shouted:

"The hell you say."

"Don't go! Listen — I'll give you the power too!" The exhortations were frantic. "If she's got the power, he gave it to her! With the rock! That's how he did it! I can give you the same power with the same rock! You've got to help me get the rock. And the girl, too! With the rock we can destroy him! And her too! Then there'll be just the two of us . . . Green! Green! O'Connor!"

Only the background crackling of the communication circuit answered him.

"O'Connor!" he shouted desperately.

After an eternity. "I'm still here."

"You'll help? You'll stay with me?" Shiva's voice was desperate.

"You make the arrangement too

enticing . . . I'll describe this location."

CHAPTER XI

LES tried to subdue the noise of his progress as he raced through the dark shadows of the trees.

Suddenly, he checked his dash. Ahead, in a small area bathed in a shaft of moonlight stood O'Connor. The metal box was pressed close to his face.

Slowing his pace cautiously, Les continued forward noiselessly. Now he could hear O'Connor speaking into the communications unit:

" . . . make the arrangement too enticing. I'll describe this location."

Les sprang the last few feet, crashing his fist into the side of O'Connor's face. The blow landed just as the secretary detected the approach and as he turned, startled.

His head snapped to one side and the box flew from his grasp, crashing against a tree. He fell limply and lay on the ground, not moving.

"I found him, Brad," Les shouted. "No damage done."

"Hold on," Brad called back. "I'm coming. Did he report our position?"

"No." Les sent his heel crashing

through the thin metal side of the receiver. "He was about to, but I stopped him in time."

Brad arrived as Les swung O'Connor, still unconscious, over his shoulder and started back for the clearing.

"You can warm up that rock," he told Brad, who was beside him now. "We've got the guinea pig."

MORE than a quarter of the surface of the metallic object glowed brilliantly under Brad's steady stare. Les and Carol had backed away from the immediate vicinity of the incandescing mass. But the full, brilliant glow bathed O'Connor's limp form, on the ground only a few feet away from the rock.

"Aren't you through yet?" Carol called urgently.

"Almost. This is a rather crude way of transmitting the power." He spoke through the side of his mouth so he would not have to turn from his task. "It can be worked out on an intravenous basis so the transference will be thousands of times more efficient and more economic. At this rate the meteorite wouldn't last for more than a hundred subjects before there'd be nothing left to it."

"When are you going to start dealing this juice out on a universal basis, Brad?" Les asked.

"Not for a long time—perhaps

two or three hundred years. First, humanity's going to get used to having the galaxy as its heritage so they don't destroy it in a fight for this one world."

O'Connor groaned.

Brad took his eyes from the meteorite. The glow began to fade.

O'Connor raised to his knees. Then he saw Brad and fear contorted his features.

"You won't be hurt," Brad assured. "This isn't going to take any explaining. You already seem to know almost as much as we do . . . I've subjected you to an experiment to give you some special powers. You are capable of projected vision. You can teleport yourself. You've also received the sense of telepathic communication."

O'Connor rose hesitatingly. "You aren't going to kill me?"

"It's more important to experiment with you." Brad did not speak the words.

Immediately, he received O'Connor's impulses of surprise. "It's true!" he told Brad telepathically. "I can do it!"

"Teleport to the other side of the rock."

The secretary disappeared and materialized at the spot where Brad had indicated.

"Good God!" he cried incredulously. "I'm—I'm not human!

"I'm like you! I'm like Shiva!"

"What else can you do?" Brad asked.

Les and Carol came forward and stood beside him.

"I can travel instantaneously! I can talk without speaking! I can see without looking—thousands of miles!" O'Connor's eyes were closed and the excitement in his voice was uncontrollable. "I'm looking now—a thousand miles away!"

Carol grasped Brad's arm. "Kill him, Brad!" she whispered urgently. "Kill him—now! He's evil—like Russell!"

"You made a mistake, chief," Les grasped his other shoulder.

An undeniable sense of foreboding surged within him and, without hesitating, Brad gathered his own psychokinetic powers and hurled a bolt at O'Connor. The site where he stood flared brilliantly, even outshining the still incandescent meteorite.

Les sighed. "That was close—too close. He might have . . ."

"He's gone!" Brad exclaimed.

"Thank God," Les added.

"No . . . he wasn't killed! He teleported away—just before the energy struck the spot!"

Les swore.

"Oh, Brad," Carol gasped. "What's he going to do? How . . .?"

"It's not all that serious," he said. "I only suggested that he

was capable of harmless applications of the power. He still doesn't know about his destructive energy—about the shields."

"But suppose he goes to Shiva?" the girl asked frantically.

Brad hadn't considered that. If O'Connor had gone there to report, he realized, it was doubtless that Russell would come to the site of the rock without delay.

* * *

"GREEN!" Shiva's face was flushed and his hands were wadded into whitened fists as he pleaded with the communication unit. "Green! O'Connor! Answer me!"

He was hoarse now, but again he jiggled the switch and called out for his agent.

It was no use. The connection had been broken.

Despondently, he dropped into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

He continued to shake. But now it was from disillusionment, apprehension, uncertainty . . . For over a century it had been Russell Granet and Clark Granet, he thought. The power that they possessed was possessed by no other person in the universe.

But now, suddenly, there were three of them: Russell Granet and Clark Granet and a girl. He caught

his breath with a sudden, demoralizing comprehension . . . There were three *now*. But soon there would be four! Then five! Then a dozen! A hundred! A million!

Tomorrow the world would have been his. At the most, it would have been his and Clark's, considering that he might eventually have to make a concession to equal power. But now it would belong to three. And soon it would belong to three million! *Soon the total three billion of the world's population!*

He laughed a dry, sarcastic laugh. "Three billion Shivas," he murmured. "Everybody a Shiva. Everybody a superman . . . like Clark wanted!"

Tears were on his cheeks as he rose, his shoulders sagging. He'd leave! Another world—another galaxy—anywhere. Any course would be better than remaining and watching the materialization of Clark's plans.

But suddenly he stiffened and rammed his fist down on the desk. Hope returned and with it came rationality, clearer thinking . . .

Maybe it wasn't too late! If he could get the rock, then there would be no more Shivas! He could never hope to eliminate Clark. But the girl—perhaps she wasn't as strong as him. She couldn't be! She could be eliminated! Then there would be only Russell and

Clark once more.

Where had O'Connor said they were? — South of Laboratory D, only a few miles away from the research facility. Abruptly he dropped the shield of psychokinetic energy that protected the temple from metaphysical intrusion. He would find them with protracted vision.

Now he was looking down on the general area. There was the laboratory buildings, ablaze with gutting fires. Five broken space ships lay on their sides, where they had been toppled by the sheer weight of surging, climbing humanity.

He sent his circle of vision sweeping southward.

But suddenly he sensed an abnormality in his office. Abandoning the search, he opened his eyes.

O'Connor stood before his desk!

"Green!" Shiva exclaimed. "I'm trying to find them. Where are . . ."

But suddenly he jolted under the effects of a terse, painful realization.

"You teleported here!" he rasped. "You're like us!"

O'Connor smiled. "Yeah, I'm like you now. I don't have to take orders any more. I don't have to bow down to a damned fanatic who thinks he's the Lord God Almighty . . . I've watched you manipulate your damned miracles twenty years now. And now I'm going to start working a few myself."

O'Connor was the fourth one! Shiva threw a damp hand over his forehead and staggered back. The lowly O'Connor—a travel agency clerk until he joined the Central Temple staff!

Uncontrollable rage exploded within Shiva. He turned on O'Connor while he felt the vortex of destructive energy swirling up from the depths of his superconscious. Then he lashed out hatefully with the lance of death power.

O'Connor disintegrated where he stood.

Shiva gasped unbelievably, then smiled. It was not too late! The third and fourth Shivas were not equal in power with the first and second. They could be destroyed!

Again his hypervision sought out the area south of the laboratory. After a moment's search he saw the bright glow emanating from the clearing in the woods.

The glowing object was the rock! The rock in its entirety! And it was enclosed in no shield that would prevent him from teleporting it away.

He saw the two men and the girl standing nearby, but he ignored them as he reached out to cloak the meteorite with a blanket of teleportive force.

BRAD did not try to constrain the sense of urgency that well-

ed within him once more as he stared at the rock. But this time he did not cast out the energy that would heat it to incandescence. Instead he summoned the special power to erect an impregnable shield around it—a screen of force that would make it as much an undisturbable object to Russell as the Fist of Shiva was an undisturbable object to him.

In only a moment, the undetectable force had coalesced around the still warm meteorite.

But before he could turn around, Les shouted hoarsely.

"She's gone!" He stumbled backward. "She disappeared!"

Frenziedly, Brad scanned the area. But he could see Carol nowhere. Then he closed his eyes. Now he was looking at the Central Temple. There was no shield around it! He looked into the office.

Russell was there—*with Carol!* She lay stiff on the floor.

Brad teleported into the temple office.

"I knew you'd come," Shiva said.

Brad bent over the girl, grasped her shoulders. But he couldn't lift her!

"I'm afraid you'll find she's adequately shielded against any influence by you." Shiva stood calmly behind his desk, his hands spread palms downward upon it.

Brad turned upon him. "Let her go!" he demanded.

"Perhaps I shall . . . I hoped you would follow. That's why I made it possible for you to teleport into the temple. I thought perhaps we might be able to—uh, bargain."

Puzzled, Brad remained silent.

"You see, I was going to teleport the rock here instead. I was going to place a similar shield around it. But I'm afraid I was a second too late. Just as I reached out for it, you erected your screen . . . So I took the next best thing—the girl. I suspected she would be a good bargaining point."

Not breathing, Brad stared at him.

"You release the rock," Shiva continued with a shrug. "You let me bring it here and slap my own shield around it . . . and I'll release her."

Brad drew closer. "And what . . . ?"

"If you prefer not to accept the agreement," Shiva interrupted, "then I shall allow you to see her destroyed . . . She isn't very powerful, you know. She hasn't yet achieved a personal protective coating, like you and me—otherwise I would have been unable to place her here."

Indecision held Brad immobile.

"You see, Clark," Shiva said em-

phatically, "I'm quite determined that although there are three of us, there will be no more. O'Connor was here a moment ago. I've destroyed him."

Brad groped desperately for a stalling point.

"Do we make the deal?" Shiva demanded.

Brad stared at Carol. Almost instinctively he had no doubt that his brother would not allow her to live after he got the meteorite.

Suddenly Brad turned and faced him again.

"It's too late for bargaining. Russell." He smiled confidently. "You're one half a day too late. I treated O'Connor tonight as part of an experiment—I made certain that he did not learn the total extent of the power at his disposal. - I didn't even let him know that he could erect a shield around himself that would make any attack by you fruitless. O'Connor was a spy. I wasn't very considerate of him."

"But, I was much more considerate of the safety of the one hundred employes of mine who were transformed this afternoon . . . They are all as invulnerable as I."

"You're lying!" Shiva gasped. "There were only four of us. Now there are only three."

"Of course I'm not lying," Brad forced conviction into his voice. "I wouldn't take any chances with

her life . . . I'll contact the first of the one hundred telepathically. You can listen in."

Brad prayed that Les had been close enough to the glowing meteorite in the woods to absorb some of its power.

"Les," he sent out the thought impulse. *"Les Roberts. This is the first chance you've had to try out telepathy. Les Roberts, this is Darson."*

"Chief! Brad!" came the answer. *"Where are you. What . . . ?"*

Shiva jolted. *"It's true!"* Dazed, he dropped into his chair.

But suddenly he rose again, scorn in his expression. "I've lost a world, Clark," he said. "But so have you!"

He fell forward across his desk.

Brad touched his shoulder . . . Like granite! His superconscious was detached from his physical form!

CHAPTER XII

COLLAPSING on the floor, Brad let his parapsyche streak from his physical being — upward and outward.

Now the earth was below. Above and all around him shimmered the celestial sphere, ablaze with its planets and myriad stars and the flaming sun with its coronal tongues vacillating in the black

space about it.

Then his searching perception orientated itself and he looked upon the huge ball of green hell—the Fist of Shiva. But even as he looked, the comet surged forward in a frightening display of speed.

But where was Russell?

As though in answer to the unspoken question came the thunderous, sustained laugh in a telepathic impulse that defied the universe.

And the comet lurched forward in another burst of acceleration.

Brad collected the entirety of his psychokinetic force and hurled it in sustained pressure against the comet. But the blasting energy was still powerless against the shield!

Now he could sense Russell's malevolent presence as the impelling force behind the sphere of destruction. Brad drew closer and to one side of the onrushing Fist of Shiva and, for the first time, his protracted vision could perceive the vague area of distorted ether that signified the space occupied by his brother's parapsyche. It seemed to be attached to the rear of the comet.

Brad hurled a frantic barrage of vicious explosive force at the insubstantial figure. But there was no effect . . . The psychic entity was as adequately protected against him as was the comet.

And all the while the Fist of Shiva gained momentum in its rush toward the earth.

Abruptly, Brad imagined himself, the entirety of the psychic being that was Clark Granet, as an opposing force—a vortex of energy with the comet itself as a focal point of application. He imagined the force pushing back, countering the power which Russell was applying—hoping all the while that he had absorbed sufficient energy from the incandescing meteorite to exert his power on the object despite its shield.

Suddenly he was aware the comet was gaining no more momentum! He was countering the effects of the impersonal shield!

But his efforts failed to retard the progress of the object. True, his power cancelled out Russell's and the Fist of Shiva gained no acceleration, but there was nothing Brad could do to decrease its speed or alter its course!

THEN he was aware of the presence of another superconscious.

Carol!

She was out here too!

Now he saw the vague, ethereal configuration that represented her presence. It, too, was immediately behind the comet, next to the formless, insubstantial mass that was Russell. Her psychokin-

etic force was being applied concertedly with Russell's!

"Carol!" Brad called.

But there was no reply.

And again he received the impression of his brother's laughter. Words followed. "She will not answer. Her actions are no longer under control of her will . . . But, Clark, there is no shield of protection around her! There is nothing to stop you from destroying her parapsyche, if you wish—and her along with it . . . Destroy her, Clark! She is one of the forces threatening the world with destruction now!"

The Fist of Shiva surged forward in new, frightening acceleration. Now it swept the relatively weak force that was Clark Granet before it, like a toreador being thrust backward on the horns of a charging bull.

Desperately, he fought it. Desperately, he drained his super-being of all the stored power it contained as he tried futilely to halt the advance of the comet.

But his strength—even with its recent intensification before the meteorite—was as nothing before the momentum of the body and the force being applied by the two parapsyches.

Faster and faster the comet came!

Abruptly, he thought of its mass and the change it must be under-

going as the result of the enormous speed. There was no electronic mass-increase-resistor unit attached to the Fist of Shiva, he realized.

How many thousands of miles a second must it be going? How close must it be reaching toward the limiting speed of physical things in the universe?

The question seemed to strike a chord of abrupt comprehension. Suddenly he knew what he must do!

Withdrawing the force he had been exerting against the object, he hastily imagined a change of direction of application. Now he focused his total energy behind the Fist of Shiva, impelling it forward together with Russell and the slave-psyche which his brother controlled!

He sensed Russell's bewildered reaction. And, as the emotion gained in intensity, he was also aware of the other's sudden release of his hypnotic control over the girl's superconscious.

Seizing control, Brad hurled her psyche earthward, watched it cover the distance in a fraction of a second as it rushed back to her physical form.

Then he reapplied his force to the comet, sending it hurtling toward the brilliant sphere of blue and green shadings that hung in space, unprotected.

RUSSELL had overcome his bewilderment. Brad could sense that! Now his brother was again applying his enthusiastic force to the driving motion.

And more rapidly did the comet plunge toward the cataclysm!

It must be only seconds away now!

But still it gained speed! Terrific speed!

As though his point of perception had suddenly become detached from his area of cosmic energy application, Brad viewed the comet, the earth, as though from a distance.

With frightening speed the gap between the two masses was vanishing.

But now he saw the change in mass he had expected of the comet.

The Fist of Shiva was no longer the apparent size of the moon. It was tremendous! It was larger than the sun—now larger than the solar system—now larger than the cluster to which the sun belonged!

Now! thought Brad.

He snapped his parapsyche from the immediate vicinity of the comet.

In his mad enthusiasm, Russell continued to apply force.

As the Fist of Shiva gained even greater speed, its expansion became more marked. But the extension was in an unfamiliar dimension! It grew in size in a direction which

Brad could not wholly perceive.

Now it was larger than the galaxy! Larger than all infinity!

But it was no longer an object existing in the universe! As it had gained size and mass, it had lost substance, paradoxically. Any object approaching the speed of light, Brad remembered, could be expected to react in that manner. Any object exceeding the limiting speed, he rationalized, would no longer exist in the material universe.

He started. The Fist of Shiva, having gone faster than the laws of nature would countenance, was gone! It was no longer evident in the vast reaches of infinity! And the superconscious, the spark of intelligence that sustained life in Russell Granet, was gone too, leaving only a normal, dead body behind in the temple . . .

* * *

IT was an unnatural quiet that lay over the desolate area that had been occupied by Laboratory C. Fires that had gutted the buildings during the night were out now and only thin whisps of smoke curled up into the pink sky. Where thousands had fought a fierce battle, goaded by hate and superstition, now there was only stillness—stillness and bodies.

Brad helped Carol over the fall-

en barb-wire and they walked to the edge of the landing field.

Topped from their steel supports the five space craft lay on the concrete apron like fallen giants. Their once smooth metal skins, ruptured from the force of the impact as they fell, were pierced with jagged metal struts from the interior of the ships, like broken bone through flesh.

Brad surveyed the vessels despondently.

Carol clung to his arm. "You've other ships, Brad," she encouraged. "A fleet of them." She looked up beyond the sky.

"They were built out there," he shrugged hopelessly. "They can't come down into the atmosphere."

"But surely some of the laboratories must be in good enough shape to salvage something—enough to finance more shuttle ships, another Space Station."

He shook his head dejectedly. "There's nothing . . . We have to go into orthodox business again to get capital. It'll be years — decades — before we're ready once more to build ships and space stations and academies."

He leaned against one of the fallen craft and ran a hand through his hair.

Carol sat on a fin beside him. "But we'll do it," she smiled. "We will get the capital and we'll build the ships and we'll give every man,

woman and child a star. And then we'll give each one an injection, that will make them just like . . ."

She frowned suddenly. "Brad . . . suppose—suppose the effects of being exposed to the heat of the meteorite aren't hereditary?"

His tired face relaxed and he smiled. "At least, that's one thing we don't have to be concerned over. I worried about it for a good while—until I found out that Spark was still alive. That offered an opportunity to do some checking. We learned that seventy-five years ago a newspaper in that vicinity carried an account of a strange litter of puppies. It was a humorous feature story which told of a farmer's frustration over six disappearing puppies and his almost futile attempts at killing the 'haunted critters'."

"I'm sure, though, that was the only litter Spark sired. It seems certain that in the animal world normal animals instinctively shy away from superanimals. That must have happened in the case of Russell's squirrel too. Otherwise we would certainly have a species of supersquirrels in that vicinity that would be sweeping away all other life forms before it."

"Then, in the case of your dog," she suggested, "it seems that the power was both hereditary and dominant."

He nodded, looking at his watch.

"Les should be getting back now."

"What did he have to go into town for?"

"He had to report."

"What?"

"I'm afraid I'm guilty of spying on him—just as he's been guilty of spying on me for the past several years."

CAROL'S face was a mask of disbelief.

"When he seemed so anxious to get to town," Brad explained, "I tracked him with protracted vision. He filed a report to the federal Office of Internal Investigation."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Yes—he's an agent. All along the government was investigating the feasibility of space flight, along the lines of our experimentation. They were also concerned over my intended application of the fleet I was gathering together."

Carol laughed. "Poor Brad . . . You didn't have *anyone* who was completely loyal, did you? What are you going to do about Les?"

"When he gets back I'm going to pat him on the back. He's had a rough time trying to decide whether to be loyal to Washington or to me."

Les walked from behind the wrecked ship. "I'm damned glad to hear that, chief. I've been sitting under this hunk of metal over an hour trying to prepare a speech

to tell you what you already know."

Brad said nothing. His smile was one of complete understanding. Grinning, Les sat beside them.

"And the age of miracles isn't over yet," Les continued. "They feel responsible over the loss of your laboratories and the Space Station and ships. They want to make it good . . . Don't get the wrong idea—you're not being subsidized. There're no obligations. It's just that they feel they didn't give you adequate protection against the forces that were working against you within the government. I understand there'll also be a grant-in-aid for your academy project."

He leaped to the ground and started to walk off.

"Where're you going?" Brad asked.

"It's been a little rough and I guess it'll be some time before you get all this mess cleaned up. I'm going to take a couple of weeks' vacation before I get back on the job. Anyway, there's a girl back home and . . ."

Carol placed a hand on his shoulder. "Les . . ." she began solicitously.

He laughed. "The brushed off would-be suitor doesn't need any condolence. I thought you were pretty classy, Carol—until I found out you were old enough to be my great-great-grandmother. Uh-huh, no Methuselah for me!"

Brad and Carol watched him teleport away.

THE END.

☆ *Saucers On The Screen!* ☆

SCOFFERS at the Flying Saucers are running into unexpected corroboration of the reports—radar is beginning to detect strange objects with astonishing regularity. Numerous scientists who have openly laughed at the mystery of the whirling discs have been forced to reconsider their ideas.

At private and military airports here and abroad, radar operators, who ordinarily are the most phlegmatic of men, are beginning to think they're going off their rockers! Pips appear where there should be no pips. Objects are located in

declination and azimuth with precision—but no objects are there, at least when Air Force planes tear out to investigate. It might be nice to label these incidents "atmospheric disturbances" except for the hard cold fact that these so-called "disturbances" happen to behave precisely like the known reports of flying saucers—speeds, sizes, distances—all coincide. Qualified technical people now realize that the flying saucer phenomenon presents a problem which can't be dismissed with "there ain't no such things"—there are!



MILK RUN

By

Robert Donald Locke

Captain Jock Warren came out of his drunken stupor to check the flight of his ship. What he found aboard made him dash for blessed oblivion!

Two hours before the vessel plunged into minus point, building up for a hundred and fifty parsec jump through hyperspace, Capt. Jock Warren was so high on narcol he couldn't read his own manifest. Not unusual on this milk run. After two hours inside of minus point, his sober gray cells were functioning like blaster tubes—but by then, it was too late. The skags had taken over control of the ship.

—Charlie Guhn's Log.

THE Star Rover, a rusty freighter that shuttled between Rigel and the home system, hovered above a transfer station some two million miles out from Rigel's twelfth planet, awaiting port clearance. Every crewman knew the skipper was oiled,

but they knew the entropy barrier would set him back a full day, shocking him into cold alertness.

Second Officer Charles Guhn knocked at the captain's cabin, entered and saluted: "Sir, cargo's loaded and customs cleared."

The skipper, his face bagged like the Coal Sack, his blood-cracked eyes possessing chilling steel-blue irises that could blister a super-cargo's hide at fifty paces, was unable to focus on the papers handed him. He growled, "Blast off, Mr. Guhn! Blast off!"

"Aye aye, sir," Guhn paused, then reported: "I thought you should know, Captain. We just brought on some skags. Some archeology outfit's shipping the things to Earth for further study."

"Blasted mummies. Next, we'll be hauling heathen idols." Captain

Warren glanced at his chronometer. "Shove-off time, is it? Go to the bridge and tell Mr. Caldwell I said to make her grunt."

This was his final utterance. His massive head slumped back into narcol stupor, his sotted brain dreaming of days when every space lane was a new frontier and adventure lurked on all unknown planets.

On his way up to the bow, Charlie Guhn poked his head into the wardroom, thinking it possible First Officer Mark Caldwell might be getting off one last message to the brunette on Rigel. But no one was in the lounge. Guhn followed the catwalk over the pulsing auxiliaries and mounted the starboard companionway to the bridge. There, he found the astrogator, pouring over a set of star charts.

"The old man says shove off," Guhn greeted him. "Got your DS done?"

Caldwell grinned, without looking up from his desk: "A DS is just a formality the rule book says you've got to enter in the log. Hyperspace's too slinky to obey normal laws. That's why we cut it in fifty parsec slices—to see how far we've drifted."

"You brain boys and your double talk."

"Not at all. Normal Einstein space is curved. Hyperspace isn't. Very simple."

"Simple like wombat chess, huh?"

"You can politely remove yourself to the deck," Caldwell replied. "I've got to get our junk pile coasting through the midnight black. Any women on board?"

"None your speed, Romeo . . . unless you like skags." A split second dodge through the hatchway eluded the waste basket hurled at him.

After his calculations looked satisfactory, Caldwell unhinged his solar plane compass. Its needle pointed not to Earth, but to that vast imaginary plane in the galaxy to which the home system was horizontal and to which a line drawn through the sun and Polaris was nearly perpendicular. Once a heading was determined, it was possible by quadrangulation to arrive at an effective course.

The transparent stardome that enveloped the bridge admitted the light of a thousand molten suns from this crowded corner of space. The astrogator looked at the clusters and thought how glad he was to leave the hot dry climate of Rigel's dusty barren worlds, not to mention the primitive women. Now, Arcturus was an exciting run, he'd heard. A spaceman's Paradise, with an exotic native culture and a nitrogen-major atmosphere. Not like the damned helium envelope of the Rigelian sys-

tem, in which a man's voice rose to female pitch.

Caldwell rang the engine room:

"Prepare to blast."

"Aye aye, sir. Curium piles on 40 plus."

"Open rear vents."

"Rear vents opened."

"Attention, deck. Close all ports."

Throughout the vessel, shutters descended to screen out the cosmic radiations that would bathe the hull as light speed approached. Alarm bells rang. The astrogator's slender hands caressed a set of blue-sheened knobs, while a dozen dials glowed with sudden green light. Bulbs dimmed as power from the auxiliaries added their load to the direct blasters. The Star Rover shuddered violently and bulkheads screamed as tortured metal leaped forward through the void.

And in the hold, the skags still slept.

ON deck, Charlie Guhn sickened briefly as acceleration took hold. Still, free space takeoffs weren't as tormenting as shaking off six to eight gravities in a surface departure. More, on some of the big planets. He wondered vaguely why the skipper preferred a narcol stupor to reality. Who knew? Perhaps thirty years of probing the black void and the deeper black of hyperspace would gnaw away

any man's defenses. It took a wife and kids to anchor a man to a world. Guhn, himself, was grateful for his family on Earth and the days he would spend with his feet planted firm on terrestrial soil. He was privileged in a way Capt. Jock Warren could never know.

When the acceleration stress decreased he descended to the hold feeling suddenly chilled. Close to the beryllium bulkheads heat was lost more readily than in other sections. Guhn made his way through the dimly lit, lightly storaged passages, skirting bales of priceless *baka* silk, hogsheads of delicious platinum-hued wine from grapes grown in the soil of Rigel IX, and lead-sheathed crates of long-lived curium isotopes, native to Rigel's fourth planet.

He approached the compartment that contained the skags. Here he halted, sensitive to the enigma which had baffled the galaxy. The strange frozen skags constituted the first and only evidence of a non-humanoid culture yet found.

They were known to have been intelligent. Their cities, lacy things of steel and plastic, still reached for clouds on the slag-red sands of Rigel IV, silent and deserted. In vaults beneath cities' surface had been discovered the last few inhabitants, perfectly preserved in death.

Controlling his repulsion, Char-

lie Guhn studied the three skags lying in composed attitudes within their globe-shaped transparent shells. Blue tentacles stuck out of bulbous heads like medusae. Inhumanly majestic faces, but lacking nostrils and ears, were supported by strong granite bodies with abnormally long arms and legs. At first glance, they appeared to be perverted human mutations. In their repose, they seemed almost alive.

Unable to look longer, Guhn climbed the nearest ladder. At the top, a crewman commented to him: "Must've been frightful in life, them skags. We'd had a battle, then, sir; a real bloody battle."

The ship's speaker vibrated with Mark Caldwell's magnified voice: "Attention, all hands. We are entering minus point."

In his cabin, Capt. Jock Warren mumbled in his narcot stupor but his burly body never stirred.

VETERAN astrogator though he was, Mark Caldwell always dreaded the approach of minus point. You never could predict what effect the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction might produce just before the jump into hyperspace when the laws of the Einsteinian universe broke down. But only at minus point could warper coils take over from blast engines.

At minus point, which set in at

186,100 miles a second, time started to reverse itself and flow backwards. Bending of the space-time continuum distorted entropy, causing an indescribably extended vessel and occupants to actually grow younger. Because human minds were unable to function during this period of cellular regeneration, robot pilots took over immediately. Two hours past the barrier, the crew would awake—at least two hours younger than at the moment of plunge.

Relays shuffled and clutches locked, clamping the Star Rover's directional controls, while Mark Caldwell fed the ship's heading figures into the mercury vat memory of the pilot. Then, he prepared for the big sleep. When consciousness returned, his brain would no longer be fogged.

The astrogator's sensitive fingers closed the last switch. Around the plowing freighter, the void strained and twisted in the flux of new forces, squeezing the vessel out of the universe as a grape is squeezed from its skin.

IT was at that moment of passing the barrier, that the skags—after a million years in the dream-barren sleep of suspended animation—awoke from their life in death. The time-reverting effect of minus point returned their bodies to that instant in the forgot-

ten past when they had retreated into mass oblivion.

First to be jolted into life in the Star Rover's dim gray hold was the mind of K'Gol. Tentacles rustled in violent wriggling activity, then massive eyelids opened to reveal cold purple eyes. As inhuman strength massed in his limbs, K'Gol stood erect, found the release to his prison shell and pressed the button. The transparent envelope collapsed, leaving him free.

Thought vibrations brought perplexed messages from the two other skags.

K'Gol studied his surroundings and said: "We have failed. The gas nebula penetrated and we are in the realm of the dead."

"We are dead, yet we breathe."

"Let us look around. We must arrive at the truth."

Stumbling along with heavy tread, the skags made their way from compartment to compartment until they found a ladder, by which they mounted. Only the faint throb of the auxiliary engines, now supplying the warpers, was to be heard. On the deck, K'Gol found two erect bodies in sculptured attitudes, the unconscious shapes of Second Officer Charles Guhn and a boatswain. All three skags halted, racked by uncontrollable revulsion at sight of the alien species.

K'Gol's limbs glowed with yellow light and he reached forth to

death-shock the monsters. But the skag behind him warned: "They may be harmless. Perhaps, we should wait until they awaken."

They explored the ship from bow to stern, stopping only to wonder at the warper coils which they would have designed differently. "It is clear. We are prisoners in a vessel-between-the-stars."

Presently, they found a control that opened the starboard view ports. Their eyes were greeted by the wrenching chaos of hyperspace. "It is a new dimension. Our captors are highly advanced and their minds are impervious to our probing. We must take over, before they recover." The skags hurried through the freighter, gathering up all possible weapons and locking them in the hold. Then, K'Gol mounted the bridge and familiarized himself with the instruments and controls.

MARK Caldwell's mind snapped back into full consciousness. For a moment, he thought that waitress at Arcturus had followed him; then, the vision suddenly changed into something horrible and he found himself facing a living skag who stood watching him with curious eyes. Caldwell's skin crawled and he started to cry out. A muscle jerk caused his arms to fail and a yellow glow simultaneously exuded from the

skag, bathing the astrogator in needle-like flame that paralyzed.

Skag and human studied each other, unable to communicate directly and each filled with horror and disgust at the other's sight. Then, having made his captive helpless, K'Gol examined the star charts on the desk, only to discover a million years had exploded the constellations like dust clouds, and the suns were unfamiliar. Again, man and skag faced each other. Without communication, the skags could not learn the ship's destination and so, although they were in power, they were as helpless as their captives.

* * *

Charlie Guhn had been thinking of Earth's green fields, a moment before the Star Rover entered minus point. Now, his mind was snapped back to terrifying reality with the knowledge that the starboard ports were unshuttered. No human found it easy to gaze at hyperspace and the officer rushed to close the ports, wondering who was responsible. He made his way to the hold and there discovered the collapsed envelopés of the skags.

His first thought was for the captain. But as he neared Jock Warren's cabin, his hackles rose as if in warning: there was a new odor in the air, slimy and deathly ancient. Then at the far end of

the passageway, he saw the back of a tentacled head rise from the steps to the engine room. Yellow flame seemed to pursue him along the corridor as he fled. An emergency hatch that led past the fore-castle to the lifeboats afforded him temporary escape and seconds later he found refuge in a lifeboat.

When his trembling ceased, he started to formulate plans to regain the ship. In the lifeboat, he discovered two force band pistols which he stuck in his belt. If worse came to worse, he could bolt the ship, risking the unknown dangers of a hyper-universe in preference to the skags.

* * *

As the narcol-induced fantasies faded from Jock Warren's brain, the skipper became aware his ship had passed minus point. Well, the old tub was on her way now and he'd have to put in an appearance on the deck . . . show the lads the old man wasn't scuttled. He splashed cold water on his face, afterwards rubbing his red-blotched skin with a rough towel. Feeling better, he hummed a vulgar space chantey he had learned as an Alpha Centauri midshipman, following which he danced a brief jig that evoked memories of an early cruise to Procyon and a lovely blackeyed wench.

Now completely spruced up, the captain buckled the triple prongs

of his white belt, donned his gold-braided space cap and stepped out of the cabin.

A live skag stood at the end of the hall waiting for him.

Doubt and disbelief wrinkled Jock Warren's brow as he stared at the apparition. He knew he was sober because the Star Rover had passed minus point. His mind groped for an explanation of the skag. There was no explanation—but there was a *solution*.

The captain backed into his cabin, locked the door and then searched through his wardroom locker until he found that most precious of all liquids, a flask of narcol. Several good strong slugs slushed down his parched gullet, before his space-hardened nerves approached reasonably good shape.

His-skin flushed and his arteries warmed by the narcol, he became convinced once more that he had suffered an hallucination. Fantasy or no fantasy, there remained only one way to learn for certain. Jock Warren strode into the corridor. There the skag waited. "Blast it!" the captain rumbled. "You're a balmy hallucination. Out of my way, you scummy dream of a scummy planet!"

He lurched towards the creature and his arms attempted to brush away its cobwebby image. Sudden contact with its cold firm flesh electrified him. "Mister

Guhn!" his voice rose. "Avast, Mr. Guhn!"

The echoes rolled through the ship without answer.

When the dead silence renewed itself, Capt. Jock Warren lifted his narcol flask and drank deeply. The skag watched with impassionate curiosity.

FAILING in his search for Rigel on the star charts, K'Gol tried to contact his companions who were exploring and making secure the remainder of the vessel. The skag concluded that the only hope lay to negotiate a truce with the monsters who had built the ship. His companions replied:

"That's your task, K'Gol. We must learn the language of these hideous creatures or teach them ours."

"I have captured one here, who appears to guide the vessel," beamed K'Gol. "Let me attempt it with him, first."

Blue light flamed from the skag, bathing Mark Caldwell's head and throat. Discovering the paralysis lifted, the astrogator rotated his head to exercise stiffened muscles. K'Gol pointed at the individual white dots on a star chart: "Kuuuh-gu." The tones were like a goat chewing tin plate.

"Kuuuh-gu," echoed Mark Caldwell. "Oh, you mean stars. Stars."

The skag waved to include the

bulkheads and deck. "Saaah-gos."

The astrogator repeated: "Saaah-gos. Must be ship."

"Must be ship," said the skag.

Hysterical laughter gripped the officer. From the skag's throat emerged identical sounds, uproarious cackles; but the brilliant eyes barely flickered.

* * *

From his place in the lifeboat, Second Officer Charlie Guhn had heard no sound for several hours. He felt cramped in a gray microcosm where it was hopeless to escape. His mind turned to the cause of the skags' revivification; it was his knowledge of physics that provided him the correct answers. The transparent shells surrounding the skags were of time-impervious materials. Upon entering minus point, the creatures retrograded in time to a point previous to their suspended animation.

What did they want? What did they plan? Without these answers, Guhn had no means to deal with them. Rather than dispatch the lifeboat, the deck officer resolved to attempt snapping the entire vessel back into normal space. He lowered himself to the foc'sle quarters. Here, the bodies of six crewmen neatly piled together stunned his eyes. At first, he supposed they were dead but a confirmatory touch of their flesh showed they were

not. Tortured faces stared at him, as if trying to project a message.

Guhn stole along the portside catwalk to the engine rooms. Finding no one, he mounted to the deck. Upon hearing the heavy tread of stumbling feet, he flattened himself against a bulkhead niche and waited.

Suddenly, words roared out in the still passageway, sung in a strong-timbered brogue:

*"Oh, our officers are eager
And our crew is full of fight!
And we're blastin' off for Vega
Where we'll drink and fight all
night!"*

It was the captain's voice, bursting with life and very merry.

The chant was taken up by another voice, a throbbing metallic speaker with slurred tones:

"Cause we've got to get her o-o-over,

O-o-over that hyper hoodomp!"

Holding his body flat in the niche, Charlie Guhn saw the skipper walk by, keeping time to his own melody by waving his massive arms. Abreast of him reeled a skag, drenched with narcot fumes. Guhn stepped out behind them, gripping the trigger of the force band pistol.

"Captain Warren! Step aside."

The skipper wheeled and his face flooded crimson:

"Mr. Guhn, may I ask what you're doing off your watch?"

"Sir, that's a skag. They've taken over the ship."

"You're hysterical, Mr. Guhn. Damned right he's a skag. Been a skag for a million years. You hear that? Best dream I've ever had. We're going to get him back to Rigel . . . next trip out. Drinks like a blasted fish, the fellow does."

Incredulity fought fear in Charles Guhn's brain, until the alternate waves of emotion caused his collapse. Capt. Jock Warren bent over and raised him. The two men's faces came close together. The skipper's eye closed slowly, once, twice: "We'll be all right if the juice holds out."

The skag bent over too in an inebriated effort to assist. Then, the skipper and his million-year-old companion locked arms and hoisted the flask of narcol.

* * *

From Charlie Guhn's Log:

The skags were friendly enough, once barriers broke down. They had suspended their civilization when a helium cloud passed through their system. Helium was

poisonous to their composition and the skag culture may have to be transferred to a nitrogen-major planet.

On termination of the voyage, Mark Caldwell, astrogator, promptly applied for transfer to the Arc-turus run. Second Officer Guhn refused to sign again and took a berth on the Earth-Mars shuttle. Capt. Jock Warren posed for a "Captain of Distinction" testimonial for the narcol people and retired on his earnings, protesting a higher fee paid to a skag for a similar portrait.

When last heard from, K'Gol and his skag companions had settled down to conferring with terrestrial scientists, making and discarding countless plans to revive the Rigel culture, and drinking narcol.

Frankly, they didn't seem to be in any hurry about reviving their brethren. Maybe, they felt they had a damned good deal all by themselves. Who knows the mind of a skag?

THE END

FEATURED NEXT MONTH . . .

THE STAR LORD

By

BOYD ELLANBY

To some passengers the maiden voyage of the STAR LORD was a pleasure cruise; to others it opened the door to a new life among the stars. But to the ship's captain it was a challenge to meet — and defeat — the deadly Ripples of hyperspace . . . See page 162 for free copy June issue.



She was beautiful, the kind of girl Joe could love. But she had been raised on Mars and never heard of the word; so he had to show her how—

Earth Can Be Fun

By John W. Jakes

SHE had a nice figure, a nicer face, and she was mad. "How did you get in here?" she said angrily.

Joe Bergman leaned against the door of the suite and dangled the key in front of her face, grinning. "Pass key. Friends."

"You're a newspaper man," she said with contempt. She walked to the window and stood with her back to him, staring out at the buildings and the windows like plates of molten gold, catching the late afternoon sun.

"That's right," Bergman said,



closing the door. "My name is Joe Bergman. I don't wear a hat at my desk, I don't drink heavily, I am unmarried, I am a generally nice guy, and I want to talk to you."

"The Foundation said no newspaper men," she told him, turning around.

"The Foundation does not have friends with keys to hotel suites. I want to get your story because it'll mean a nice fat bonus. When the first woman born on Mars comes to Earth for the first time, that's news."

"I didn't come here because I wanted to," she said quickly. "I only came back because I'll collect the trust fund left me by my father when I'm twenty-three. That'll be tomorrow. Then I can take the first rocket back to Mars and resume work."

"What kind of work?" Joe said, taking out a small notebook and writing things down.

"Zoology. I'm currently studying the relationship between one of the recently classified Martian phylums and the Terran crustaceans."

"My my," Joe said gently. "Sounds like fun. You like it, eh?"

"Yes. Very much. It's my life and my work. It's the only thing I've ever known, and I like it."

"Don't get so excited," he said. "By the way, is your first name

really Amanda?"

"Well of course it is!" She flounced down in a chair, angrier than ever.

He shook his head. "Amanda Williams. What a name for a girl like you."

"Look," she said a bit harshly, "you're in. You want a story. It'll save me a lot of trouble if I give it to you. I don't want any more publicity than is necessary, and a story is better than a brawl. I'd have to have you thrown out otherwise, wouldn't I?" she finished, studying him.

"You sure would." He tried to smile brightly, but he kept getting disturbed by her face, her soft-looking brown hair, by her softly rounded body molding the severe plastic uniform. "Well," he said finally, "just exactly what is your opinion of Earth?"

She laughed. "You ought to be able to guess. I dislike it intensely. The people are dull and noisy and emotional. That's the worst part. I've learned that science is the only thing that can be trusted, Mr. Bergman. Out there on Mars, the air is cool and clean. You can think clearly. You can sift your feelings and discard those generated by the emotions. You get into far less trouble."

"Agreed," he said. "But you don't have any fun. Have you ever

had what you might call an . . . emotional experience?"

"Of course not."

"You ought to try one sometime. The reaction might be pleasant."

She shrugged, moving to the phonograph. Joe winced at the thing. It was angular and functional and somewhat hideous. The music was even worse.

"What is that noise?" he asked.

"Beautiful, isn't it? Norkell's Mechanical Symphony. He's a biochemist at Marsport, but he's trying to develop new musical ideas on the side. I love his work. It has all the precision of a machine."

"It also has all the soul of a wet cabbage," Joe commented.

"Look," she said again, walking up to him quickly, "if you don't want any ideas, don't come around unlocking doors and asking for them."

HE snapped his notebook shut. "Miss Williams, I make it a point to let people have their own opinions. But I don't like to see this planet run down. After all, I was born here, and I like it a lot."

"Isn't that nice," she said acidly.

"I'll bet you never had any fun in your whole life. Twenty-two years . . ."

"My pleasure . . ." she began coldly.

"... is in relating Martian bugs to Terran amoebas, or whatever. I know all about it. Tell me one thing."

"Yes?" Her voice made him see pictures of the ice caps at the poles of Mars.

"Do you live in a test tube?"

"See here, Mr. Bergman . . ."

"You see here, Miss Williams. I've gotten rather mad in the last couple of minutes. As I said, you wouldn't know a good time if you saw it. Why, if you were set down in the middle of an average Terran family eating dinner and enjoying themselves, you'd begin looking for different kinds of phylums in the soup. I'll bet you couldn't get a kick out of a shady joke, or even enjoy being in love, if you know what that is, at all. But I like Earth and I'm damned glad to be here."

"There isn't one single thing I could find entertaining," she replied.

He took a deep breath. "You want to bet?"

"W . . . w . . . what?"

"I said, do you want to bet? You'll have plenty of money by tomorrow morning. I won't. So I'll make you a special kind of bet. Give me until six a. m. tomorrow morning. Go out with me. I'll show you part of our city. The people here are pretty much like the peo-

ple all over Earth. If you don't enjoy yourself, okay. If you do enjoy yourself . . . and I don't see how you could help it, if you're the least bit human . . . then you pay me a hundred bucks."

"You're insane," she said, her eyes wide. "You're absolutely insane."

"Well, I may be. But I enjoy living. I don't think you do." He paused, waiting for her reply. It didn't come, so he said, "Are you scared?"

"Scared? What does science have to fear from the emotions?"

"Oh, can it," Joe said sourly.

"I'll go," she said softly with determination. "I'll go, Mr. Joe Bergman, but I won't have a good time."

He headed for the door. "I'll hold up the story for the time being and arrive back here at six this evening. Get some rest. We'll have twelve hours to defrost you." He closed the door as she said something not quite ladylike.

Riding down to the street in the lift tube, he began to wonder. He pushed his hat onto the back of his head. This was going to be a tough job. How did you go about convincing someone who had never been on Earth before that people did enjoy themselves? Maybe it was utterly impossible for her.

He walked out into the street

and the late yellow sunlight, remembering how pretty she was. Then he thought about the bet. It was sure—as hell going to be a tough job.

THE big launch putted across the artificial lake, jammed with laughing people. Kids held hands with their girls, and a fat lady with three children tried to decide which one of them was going to get the largest piece of chocolate bar.

Ahead of the boat, Joy Island rose, a fantastic tangle of electric bulbs and searchlights and noise and music and laughter. Joe and Amanda sat in the center of the launch, not speaking.

"What is this place?" Amanda said at last.

"Amusement park," Joe replied glumly. "Best one in the country. Guess the best one on Earth." He was discouraged already. The ride from the hotel to the boat dock had been rather silent. Every comment of his, about the pleasant night air, the music from the cop-ter radio, had been met with a cold little smile that was decidedly unfriendly.

"Do people do this often?" she asked.

"Yes. I come here once a year or so myself, to relax."

"Are you relaxing tonight, as

you so quaintly put it?"

"Nope," he said, "I don't think so."

The boat nuzzled the pier. Before the motor chunked into silence, the people were pouring onto the landing. Joe helped Amanda off. She drew her arm away from his hand. He settled his hands into his pockets and shook his head.

They went through the brightly lit gate into the magical world of the lights and the laughter. People rushed by them, hurrying, holding hands, laughing, eyes flashing back the electric glow. There were warm smells in the air, of popcorn and peanuts and a possible summer rain. Rockets from the city trailed red in the sky over the park like roman candles.

"Some of those ships may be going to Mars," Amanda said softly.

"Oh for pete's sake, don't be so melancholy. You'll be back in the test tube soon enough. We've got till six tomorrow morning. So don't give me any trouble."

She sniffed petulantly.

He said, "Do you want some popcorn?"

"What's that?"

Joe rolled his eyes to heaven and shelled out a quarter to the vendor. Amanda took the warm paper bag and put a few of the flowery white kernels into her mouth.

For a minute her eyes seemed to

glow almost pleasantly, and then her mouth turned down. "Strange taste," she said.

Joe snatched the bag out of her hand, put a handful into his mouth and said between gulps, "I eat, I don't analyze."

They went on rides. *The Moon Rocket, The Twirlawhip, The Dimension Traveler, The Time Machine.*

They went through fun houses: *Mummy's Ruins, Caverns of Luna, House of a Thousand Terrors, Laugh Palace.*

Amanda's uniform was not designed to be elevated by gusts of air. Her face remained almost expressionless, except for its slight smile of boredom when they went through the tilting rooms and had the floor fall out from under them. They bumped down a long series of rollers, sitting down. Amanda was distinctly displeased.

WHEN they came out of the last fun house, Joe looked gloomily around the midway. Then he remembered that he, at least, should appear to be having fun. She was so damned pretty. If only she could laugh like some of the other girls around him, who weren't half so nice looking . . .

"No fun, eh?" he said. "Anywhere?"

"It all seems rather silly," she

said. "I don't see how people can enjoy being tossed around like that."

"Haven't you ever done anything besides think?" Joe asked her.

"No," she replied.

He looked around some more and said, "Let's go this way."

"What is that thing?"

"Ferris wheel. It's an old timer. Maybe the other rides were too modern. This one's basic."

Afterwards, Joe decided that it might have been basic, all right, but as an entertainment device for a female zoologist from Mars, it stunk. As a last resort, he tried the roller coaster.

The chain of cars creaked slowly up the long incline toward the first dip. The lights of the park dropped away below them, a woven web of colored splashes, filled with the moving shapes of people.

"The air's nice up here," Joe said.

"Warm. I think there'll be rain."

Conversation, Joe felt, was not the right approach. The cars reached the top of the slope, hesitated, and began the first plunging fall. Feminine voices lifted in high-pitched screams. Amanda kept her lips tightly together.

When they hit the second dip, Joe put his arm around her and squeezed protectively. A moment

later he noticed that her mouth was moving.

"What?" he yelled above the wind and the female shrilling.

"I said please don't do that."

He removed his arm, folded his hands in his lap and sat for the rest of the ride feeling like the wet cabbage he had described to her earlier in the day.

Once out in the midway, he headed for the boat landing. His watch said twelve midnight. Something was needed, desperately. She hadn't enjoyed herself one bit.

"Really," she said as they walked toward the main gate, "this is all a bit silly. Why don't you take me back to the hotel?"

"Oh no. A bet's a bet. You're going to stick with me until six o'clock even if your intellect is completely degenerated. Come on." He pulled her by the arm, a trifle roughly, toward the launch.

On the way back to the city, the rain that had been threatening all evening arrived. The launch pilot moaned about the fact that he had no canopy. It had looked so nice early in the evening. Many of the passengers found the situation somewhat humorous, but Amanda stared straight ahead, refusing to say a word.

When they landed at the city pier, they were thoroughly soaked. The rain still came swishing down.

Joe headed for the copter station at a trot. Amanda walked calmly after him and Joe wondered if, through some prank of an unkind fate, he had been hexed at birth.

THE rain still drizzled down when they arrived at Mama Goldberry's. Only about a dozen diners still remained. Drying off in the copter had been a chilly process. Joe stood just inside the door, smelling the warm fragrant air, enjoying the soft lighting on the old wooden tables and the polished walls.

Mama Goldberry, with her round heavy face, greeted them at the door, as she did all customers. She wore a long checked dress and a big white apron and her smile showed that she loved food and cooking for people. Joe introduced Amanda, who replied with a polite greeting, and Mama Goldberry led them to a table.

"Joey," Mama said when they were seated, "you haven't come round for a long time."

"Busy, Mama."

"Busy busy busy. All the time people are busy. You shouldn't be so busy, Joe. You'll wear yourself out, in here." She smiled and tapped the left side of her ample bosom.

"I like to come here," Joe said. Amanda watched him, puzzled.

Mama clapped her hands together. "What to eat?"

"Three or four salami sandwiches, to begin with. On rye bread."

"Good," Mama said. "We just made some fine salami. And some of our wine?"

He nodded, feeling warm inside. "A bottle."

When Mama went out to the kitchen, Amanda asked, "Why do you like her so much?"

"Because she likes me, I suppose. She's a good woman, and she can make wonderful food. There are very few cooks like Mama Goldberry any more."

"With scientific cooking, things can be done much more efficiently."

"Oh, sure," he said, feeling resigned to his fate. "You won't like the salami and you won't like the wine. But I do."

He lit a cigarette and sat quietly, looking at her, wishing she could be the least bit friendly. From the outside, she was the kind of a woman he could fall in love with. But from the inside . . . statistics . . . list of alien phyla . . . *oh hell* . . . Several couples moved on the dance floor. Papa Goldberry had waved at Joe between numbers. He and two other elderly men played soft melodious violins into the small hours of the morning for peo-

ple who liked a quiet place to eat good food and be alone.

Determining to make another try, Joe asked, "Do you dance?"

"I never have."

"Might as well learn." He took hold of her hand as they went to the dance floor. There was no response.

They walked to the bandstand. The musicians finished their number.

"Hello, Papa," Joe said.

"Hello, Joey. Good to see you again." Papa was round-faced like his wife, and a halo of bushy gray hair stood up around his skull. He wore a black coat and a tiny black tie, and his gnarled hands held the shimmering polished wood of the violin with great tenderness and affection.

"What would you like to hear?" he asked.

"I've got only one favorite." Joe grinned.

The other two musicians smiled and nodded, and the three of them began playing *My Heart Stood Still*.

AMANDA moved her feet rather stiffly, and she stayed a good distance away from him, but she caught on easily. Joe listened to the music and let it get the best of him, as it always did.

Deftly, he slipped his arm around her and pulled her close so that her

hair brushed his cheek.

"That's a real oldie," he said. "Almost sixty years." He began to hum softly.

"Please," she said, stiffening.

"You don't like dancing close?" he said, feeling rather malicious.

"No."

"Well, that's a shame."

And he kept right on dancing that way until the music stopped.

The food and the wine were waiting at the table. Amanda took only a small bite of the sandwich and winced. She sipped the wine.

"It's all new," she said. "Completely new."

"I like it," Joe said. He began to feel melancholy. "I guess I was wrong, trying to make you enjoy the things I do. People are different. You were born on Mars."

"It's all very strange," she admitted.

"And not scientific at all," he said. The wine made a pleasant warmth in the pit of his stomach. "I suppose you'll never be any different."

He watched her, a kind of sorrowful smile on his lips. Right then, he knew he could fall in love with her very easily. But she wasn't the kind to fall for anything but Martian bugs.

Well, he might as well have a good time. It was nearing three o'clock. Everyone else had gone home.

Papa and Mama Goldberry came over and sat down with them, and Papa played the violin and Mama talked about the old country and how they would never get her on a rocket, no, Earth was good enough for her. She never wanted to leave her cooking. The old man and woman laughed at one another, with one another, talking over small private jokes, sharing them with Joe and trying to share them with Amanda.

She sat straight and unmoved.

About four forty-five, Joe paid the check and said goodnight to the old couple. As they walked out into the street, Joe said, "They don't know anything about animal life on Mars, but they're happy."

Amanda didn't say anything.

The rain had gone, and the night air was sharp and cool.

"It isn't far to the hotel," Joe said wearily. "We might as well walk. I'll let you off an hour ahead of time."

He liked smelling the air at this time of night. A copter whirled somewhere above the buildings. In the gutters, rainwater ran, making rivers of bright gold.

"I like this time of night," Joe said, not caring a great deal about how she felt any more. He felt the battle was lost. "I like the air and being alone when it's cool."

They came to a corner and he

stopped and looked at her. "You know something."

"What?"

"I've never walked with a girl at this time of night before."

"I can see why. It's cold."

"Sure," he sighed. "It's cold. That's all you can think about. Temperatures and things."

"You've got to remember I was brought up that way."

"Well, somebody must have wanted to make you unhappy. They sure did a fine job."

THEY walked the rest of the way to the hotel in silence. At the entrance, he said, "I'll take you up."

"There's no need to, really."

"But a gentleman always does that. At least you'll be able to say you had one official date in your life." A lazy grin crossed his face. "I tried. I tried pretty hard, Miss Williams. I thought I could turn you into a human being in twelve hours, and it just didn't work."

"I'd like to tell you . . ." she began.

He waved aimlessly. "Save it. I know I lost the bet. I knew it when we started out tonight. I'll probably be very angry in the morning." He took a deep breath. "In fact, I'm getting angry right now."

"Why? Because I couldn't enjoy myself?"

"Yes. Because that damned scientific foundation locked you up on Mars and said, Amanda Williams, don't ever be a human being."

"I've never known any other life. Mars is everything. My work . . ."

"I know, I know!" he said loudly. He was getting damned good and mad now, at her, and at the Foundation that had made her stay on Mars and learn, so she could collect the fortune of her father and go back to Mars for more work.

His brain was functioning rapidly now, even a bit maliciously. "Since you're so damned hot for this science, and experiments, I think I'll conduct a little experiment of my own." He jerked her hand a bit roughly. "Come on."

He pulled her down the street. She struggled to keep up with him, almost running. He took determined, long-legged strides.

"Let me go!" she said ineffectually.

"Oh, no," Joe muttered darkly, "We're going to conduct a little experiment." They hurried on, through the dark shiny streets, for several more blocks. Finally, up ahead, a huge square building loomed.

Joe marched up the wide front steps, pulling her along, and halted before the wide glass doors.

"What . . . what is this place?" Amanda said, looking around in a

confused manner.

"City Library." Joe was pounding his fist loudly on the doors.

"But . . . it's late . . . we can't get in."

"Listen," Joe said threateningly, "I'll break the door if I have to. When I get mad, Miss Williams, I get dangerous."

She hung onto his hand while he flailed at the door with his other fist. He did not have to break it down. After about five minutes, a light began to bob, back in the caverns of darkness, and a short, balding, round-nosed little gnome of a watchman unlocked the door.

He held up the square cube of glowing plastic, illuminating Joe and Amanda in its white glow.

"You can't come in," the watchman said defensively, as if he was afraid to offend them. "It's too late. We don't open until nine . . ."

"Out of my way," Joe said.

"No, I can't," the watchman complained.

Rapidly, Joe fished his notebook from his pocket and waved it under the watchman's nose. "Press," he mumbled tersely, pushing by the little man with Amanda still hanging on.

"But Superintendent Lumpkin will have me fired!" the little man wailed.

"Just keep quiet and nobody'll ever know," Joe told him.

The watchman darted confused glances at the two of them and scuttled off into the shadows.

JOE lit a match and proceeded to rack his brain for knowledge of the Dewey Decimal System, Revised Semantic Version AD 1964. After much wandering through the darkened corridors, up and down stairs, he finally found what he sought, on a bottom shelf. Flipping a wall switch for light, he pulled out a book at random. When he opened the pages, a fine cloud of dust showered down on him.

"You know what this is?" he asked loudly.

"N . . . no . . . " Amanda replied.

"A Study of Ecology on the Planet Mars, by V. V. Bundy."

"I know him," Amanda said.

"I'll just bet you do." Joe had the book open. "Now," he said, "here's the experiment. We'll see just how stone cold you are. Watch your own reactions. Study them!"

Sonorously, he began to read from the book.

"The ecological distribution of the Martian Gochi bird varies, strangely enough, from the frozen polar caps to the greensward plains. This is because the Gochi bird, through the differentiation of its three sexes, has a different structural adaptability in the matter of

epithelial covering and protection. The male and female Gochis have extra-heavy fur-like epithelial coverings, making life possible for them in the polar regions. The neuter Gochi bird, devoid of sex, is also devoid of a heavy epithelial covering and must content itself in the temperate plains regions." He slammed the book, and dropped it on the floor.

"Now," he said, advancing slowly, "that's what you get on Mars. Great, eh? Here's what you get on Earth."

Joe put his arms around her and kissed her, hard.

He kissed her for a long time, hoping that the old electric currents or whatever were transferring the old magnetism or whatever, and . . . oh hell . . . he stopped thinking and concentrated on kissing.

A couple of minutes later, he let her go. She gasped, sagging a bit against the racks of books.

"You're a scientist," he said loudly. "Examine the reactions. Which one was the most . . . pleasant?" He was afraid that he leered at her a bit too suggestively.

"Really," she said, a hint of indecision in her voice, "I don't know. I can't tell until . . . until . . . " She hesitated, a faint reddish tint coloring her cheeks.

"Forget it," he snapped. "If you don't know now, you never will."

He grabbed her hand. "Come on."

Joe led her back out of the library. There was a portly gentleman waiting on the steps, standing next to the watchman who cringed. The portly man, Joe soon found out, was none other than the much-feared Superintendent Lumpkin, whom the gnomish watchman had summoned from his pleasant, scientifically-heated bed.

"I don't understand this, Mr. Bergman," Lumpkin said stiffly.

Joe, feeling terrible, turned to Amanda. "You might as well go on home. The hotel isn't very far."

She started to say something, but Joe was wheedling the big man with talk of important research and a feature about him and the Library in the Sunday Supplement. Finally, he persuaded Superintendent Lumpkin to forget the matter and have a beer with him.

"I could get you arrested," Superintendent Lumpkin said.

"I know," Joe said glumly, noticing that Amanda was gone. "I need a friend. I need lots of friends."

"I could use a beer," the watchman offered.

"Come on," Joe said, "even if you did turn me in."

They had their beer, and finally Joe took a copter back to his apartment. He could have fallen in love with her, he told himself. Funny

things happened to people.

He threw his hat down on the floor and stepped on it. A hell of a fine spokesman he made for Mother Earth. But what could you expect from a machine? That's all she was. A machine with a beautiful exterior and nothing but cogs and wheels on the inside.

Before he went to bed, he kicked the pillow several times around the room, knowing he would be even madder in the morning.

HE was.

He yelled at people in the newspaper office. By ten o'clock he stormed out, grabbed a copter, and went stalking into the main room where the board of the Williams Scientific Foundation was meeting.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" the chairman said, as if he had the speech rehearsed for unwelcome visitors.

Several bald gentlemen, several thin gentlemen, several fat gentlemen and several gentlemen who were odd combinations of all three, turned to look at him.

"My name is Joe Bergman. I'm a newspaper man, and I'm going to write a nasty story about all of you."

"Young man . . ." the chairman said.

"You keep quiet. I went out with a girl last night. Amanda Williams.

The first woman born on Mars. So that's okay. That's fine and dandy. But if you ever again pull anything like you pulled on her, Lord help the human race. That girl isn't a woman in any sense of the word. She's a walking textbook on zoology."

"I fail to see where that should concern you," the chairman said archly. "Her father wished her to remain on Mars until her twenty-third birthday, which is today."

"I don't care if she's a scientist or a lady plumber. The point is, she's had one kind of an education and she's completely neglected learning anything about being human. And that makes me mad. Because I fell in love with her last night. Do you understand that? Is it possible for you to understand that? Love. El oh vee ee. Or do you think of that only as some kind of damned chemical process?"

"We have wives, young man. And there is no reason for you to come to us to rave and complain."

"Oh yes there is. If anything like this gets started on a wide scale, look out. Men won't have wives any more, they'll have . . ."

"Joe . . ."

"They'll have . . ."

He realized that someone had spoken to him. He turned around. Amanda stood in the tall doorway of the room. She was smiling at him.

It was a rather weak, half-hearted smile, but she was trying.

Joe almost fell over.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said hastily, pushing her through the door.

"How long have you been hanging around?" he demanded.

"I was upstairs, in the lab. One of the assistants heard you were down here. He told me."

"So?"

"So . . . well . . . last night . . . that experiment. I didn't get a chance to tell you . . ."

" . . . that you liked the book. I know all about it!"

"Don't be angry, Joe."

"Why not?"

"Because . . . well . . . I tried to tell you last night. I just didn't have enough . . . experiments . . . to go on. I've read a lot of those books, but . . . well . . . that was the first time I'd ever been kissed."

"Did . . . did you like it?" Joe asked slowly.

"Oh yes." An almost impish light shone in her eyes. "But I really should have much, much more data to work with before I decide. I think it will take quite a while. I'll have to stay here, of course. We can do other things, too. I'd like to learn how to enjoy some of the things you enjoy. But we must keep up with our experiments." She laughed, wriggling her

shoulders. "That kiss was . . . " She wriggled her shoulders again and said in a tiny voice, " . . . nice."

He stared at her closely for a minute. "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes, Joe, I do."

He could tell that she did.

"Whoop!" He did a kind of impromptu soft shoe dance. "Listen, Amanda. I can coach you. It'll take a long time, but if you want to try . . . "

"I'll try."

"We'll go to movies, and to picnics, and back to Mama Goldbergy's." He was laughing out loud. "I'm not such a bad salesman after

all."

She smiled and nodded. "But we must keep up with the experiments."

He put his arms around her, then stopped.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

Joe put a finger to his lips and peeked around the edge of the door. The members of the board were craning their necks, watching expectantly.

"So long, boys," Joe said, and slammed the door.

He looked at Amanda.

"Happy birthday," he said. "In the interests of science."

And then he kissed her.

THE END

☆ Space Signals ☆

IT is discouraging (perhaps!) to know that modern science thinks very little of the idea of life existing on other worlds than our own—except for the lowest forms, possibly some sorts of plants. Whether the stars with planetary systems have life is another matter; we simply don't know.

But before this scientific damper was put on the enthusiasm of the hopeful, many prominent scientists were intrigued with the idea of life on other worlds, so much so that they advocated signalling to them! Perhaps the best known is the famous idea of Gauss who wanted forests planted in the form of math-

ematical symbols which would surely be recognized by any intelligent creatures.

Another scientist of the time suggested digging large ditches in the Sahara, filling them with kerosene and igniting them at night! These ditches too were to be in the shape of triangles, circles and squares and of course were to be miles in extent.

Even more imaginative were suggestions to fire off large quantities of flash powder at night, or to create large explosions.

With the advent of radio back in the Twenties, numerous efforts were made to send and receive sig-

nals. Many amateur enthusiasts as well as professionals maintained automatic sending stations transmitting easily recognizable pulses. Aside from a brief flurry of excitement when some optimistic watcher mistook static for answers, the efforts seem to have been in vain.

With modern radio and radar transmitters of extreme power, it is a certainty that we have sent strong enough signals into space, signals which could have been detected by suitable equipment such as intelligent creatures would be assumed to possess. Perhaps such signals—if there is life—have been sensed. We can only guess.

When space stations are built, or when men go to the Moon, they will be able to check further these ideas: The theory has been worked out and the apparatus exists for interplanetary communication. Men will use it some day, and it is to be hoped they may contact other peoples, slim though this chance

appears in view of present observations.

The discovery of the canals of Mars—whatever they are—set off a burst of signalling activity. Any similar discovery today—would do the same, except we would be so much better prepared to actually perform the task. Suppose evidence of life or activity were found on Mars or Venus! Technology would break its back to find a way to contact, most likely by radio.

As for interstellar communication we can only say—who knows? Space is full of radio signals as we know. Most of it is noise, random radio-activity due to atomic and molecular action. But perhaps in that noise are buried the faint and feeble signals of a people living a myriad of light-years away. We cannot yet know. There is hardly a scientist today however who will not concede that it is unlikely that Man is the only inhabitant of the whole Universe—it just doesn't make sense!



"This used to be more fun before space travel."



DOOM SATELLITE

By

A. Bertram Chandler

Benson found it easy to commit murder in space. He wasn't worrying about the law—getting rid of the body was his big problem!

BENSON, strapped into his chair at the navigator's desk, looked at the bulkhead clock and then stared, with bloodshot eyes, through the port and waited for the satellite to appear. It floated into sight, as it always did, on the precise half second, a small body, rotating slowly on its longitudinal axis, of a shape that was at once irregular and symmetrical.

It had once been a man.

For long seconds it hung in the field of Benson's vision, moving with a ghastly parody of life. As it turned so that the moving light of the distant sun shone on its face Benson could see the darkness around eyes and nose and mouth that was crystallized, frozen blood. He could not see, but could imagine, the burst eyeballs and ruptured eardrums. When, at last, it vanished, drifting sternwards,

Benson knew it would return in precisely thirteen minutes, twenty-four point three-six seconds. He had found, he remembered, a certain grim amusement in calculating the elements of its orbit. That amusement had long since been replaced by horror.

He thought, as he had thought so many times before, of disturbing the delicate balance of this tiny primary satellite system by a brief application of the Drive. He considered, and not for the first time, the probable consumption of propellant for the landing on Mars, the eventual take-off and the return to Lunar Base. He knew that the Pile itself could take him clear to Alpha Centauri and back — but that the tanks containing the precious propellant, water, without which the Pile was no more than a generator of useless heat and radiation, contained, unless he

were unlucky enough to meet with an unforeseen emergency, barely enough reaction mass for the round voyage.

"Of course," he whispered aloud, "if there's water on Mars . . ."

But he wasn't sure. Even with their instruments mounted on the airless Moon, with perfect seeing conditions, the astronomers couldn't be sure. There was only one way to find out—to go there. He, Benson, would find out—but Hughes, the other member of the two man crew of *Ad Astra*, the first Mars rocket, would never know.

Or wouldn't he? wondered Benson. Did he, perhaps, know everything now? Or . . . nothing?

Rotating slowly on his longitudinal axis Hughes drifted into sight again and Benson, strapped in his padded chair, cursed the dead man.

THIS was one of the occasions upon which the psychologists had blundered. There were two of them attached to Lunar Base, ever on the watch for any signs of mental instability among the inhabitants of that extra-Terran goldfish bowl. But they had had no time to make a really detailed study of Benson and Hughes, who had been ferried up from Earth just prior to the blasting off of *Ad Astra* on her long monotonous voyage. And the psychologists of the Interplanetary Commission, back on Earth,

had blandly assumed that their colleagues on the Moon would be able to make the necessary decisions. So it was that Benson and Hughes had been put through merely a few routine tests for compatibility—both were, in addition to their other qualifications, experienced rocket pilots. They were given a far more thorough physical checking over, and then sent roaring Marsward with the blessings and good wishes of all concerned.

Eight months is a long time. Eight months of free fall, of weightlessness, of tasteless food, of stale air and of flat, constantly used and re-used water. Eight months in a steel coffin, with nothing outside but the hard vacuum of Space and the bright, too bright, unwinking stars. Eight months to remember, to long for clouded skies and the beating of rain on windows, food properly cooked and served without the taint of tin, and water sparkling and alive, not flat from the distiller.

However, Benson thought, the psychologists could be excused, perhaps. Both men were chess addicts. They shared an enthusiasm for music, good music, and the ship was well stocked with recordings of the operas and symphonies for which they had both expressed a liking. And there were books and more books, especially printed on light weight paper and with al-

most weightless, yet amazingly strong bindings. The inclusion of a small piano in the equipment had actually been considered—but at this stage the ghost that haunts all rocketeers, Mass Ratio, had raised its ugly head. It was pointed out by the designers of *Ad Astra* that her primary function was to get two men to Mars and back, not act as a crammed recreation room.

Both Benson and Hughes would have liked the piano, but neither of them was prepared to sacrifice recordings or books so that the piano might be carried. Which was, perhaps, rather a pity. As well as being a musical instrument a piano is a fine safety valve for the letting off of emotional steam.

So, with her Pile functioning sweetly, with her stocks of food and water, with her little hydroponics garden that was to be both a source of vitamins and an air conditioning plant, with her books, games and musical recordings, with her two man crew that was the biggest "x" in the equation, *Ad Astra* blew a neat, miniature, slightly radio-active crater in the fine pumice dust of the Moon's surface. She hung for long seconds, apparently motionless, balanced on the incandescence of her Drive, then lifted, faster and faster, to vanish among the stars.

The astronomers kept her in

sight for a million miles, the radar experts for another two hundred and fifty thousand or so. Then she was gone, and after the excitement caused by the reception of her first few signals had died out, Lunar Base settled down once more to its routine of observation, exploration and the first beginnings of exploitation.

And on the rare occasions that anybody thought about *Ad Astra* and her crew it was with a certain envy.

YES, they were to be envied. Theirs would not be the achievement of Amundsen or Peary, of Lindbergh, of Ross and Wahlgren, the first men in the Moon. But their names would bulk big in the annals of astronautics—the first men on Mars. Although it is doubtful if this aspect of the matter occurred to them—to be the first, that was enough, and if those who followed cared to make any sort of fuss about it that was only incidental.

There was a sense of dedication, which both of them felt, when they strapped themselves into their deeply padded chairs for the blasting off. Hughes, as Pilot, let his thick, hairy fingers rest lightly on the banked controls. Benson, the Navigator, looked once out of the ports to the harsh black and white of the Moon's surface, to the low

dome of Lunar Base, to the great green and gold globe that was Earth riding low in the black sky over the jagged range to the southward. A half smile softened the severe angularity of his face as he looked down to his nested chronometer. Hughes, his heavy face impassive, waited for Benson to give the word.

The second hand crawled around the dial.

"Now!" said Benson.

The acceleration forced him deep into his chair, the thunder of the Drive, even muffled as it was by the layers of insulation essential with any atomic power unit, deafened him. Dimly, faint as distant church bells pealing during a thunderstorm, he heard the almost musical jangling of some loose bulkhead fitting. He forced up his head against the weight of the acceleration, stared through the ports. The mountainous Lunar horizon had gone and there was only the blackness of Space and the stars.

He looked down once more to his chronometer, waited until seconds and minutes had crawled into the past and then gave Hughes the word to cut the Drive. Unsnapping the buckles, he released himself from his chair. The economy and grace of his movements showed that he was no stranger to conditions of free fall. Taking his sextant from its rack he made his

observations; his keen mind, slide rule and nimble fingers converted them into terms of acceleration and azimuth, vector and orbit. Auxiliary jets flared briefly. For a few minutes the two men experienced weight again—but weight of the uneasy stomach twisting kind enjoyed by those who patronize the more violent and uncomfortable rides at a Luna Park.

Then, with *Ad Astra* falling free down the long, curved path that would, at the end of eight months, intersect that of the planet Mars, Hughes got up from his chair, went to check the water remaining in the tanks. The meters on his control panel showed a consumption slightly higher than had been anticipated. Benson busied himself with the first log entries of the voyage. He was still writing when Hughes returned. He felt the other's arm across his back, heard him say, "Well, Bill, we're on our way!"

His flesh flinched from the contact. He said, "You know I don't like Christian names. And—keep your paws to yourself, please."

Hurt, and a little bewildered, Hughes replied, "If that's the way you want it, Benson . . ."

"Yes. That's the way I want it."

YES, that was the way he wanted it.

Once, during a visit to an Ital-

ian cathedral, he had expressed disgust with the paintings displayed on the walls, the pictures in which the artists, obedient to the canons of their school and time, had filled the foreground with an intimate huddle of men, women, children and dogs. He had said then to his slightly amused and slightly shocked wife—they were on their honeymoon—that he far preferred the clean, empty spaces between the stars. She was to remember this little incident later when he objected, violently, to being mauled in play by their first and only son. When she left him for another, warmly human man the severest blow suffered by Benson was to his pride.

He was an idealist in his way, Benson knew. And under normal conditions he could maintain his standards of the inviolability of his person easily, avoid, without fuss and bother, the little physical contacts that are taken as a matter of course in any society of gregarious beings. He had, it is true, piloted rockets on the Lunar Ferry service—but there, as Captain, he had succeeded in keeping very much to himself. Besides, those ships, compared with *Ad Astra*, were like a circus Big Top set alongside a bell tent.

There was, in fact, only one major difference — if one does not consider the materials used for

construction — between the Mars ship's living quarters and a bell tent. In a bell tent you can pull the flap aside and go out into the woods and fields and get away, if that is your desire, from the person with whom you are sharing it. But in the confines of the ship you stayed put.

In the living quarters much space was taken up by their personal effects and by the material provided for their recreation and comfort. Physical contact was unavoidable—their magnetic soled shoes were a poor substitute for gravity and at times they floundered around like a pair of singularly clumsy goldfish in a tiny bowl. After a lapse of only three days—measured by his chronometer—Benson found himself spending more and more time in the control room, taking entirely unnecessary observations, or down in the storeroom, checking and restacking the already thoroughly checked stores. And then Hughes, like a huge, clumsy and overly affectionate dog, would join him and insist on helping him.

Benson began to hate Hughes.

Two weeks out, and the strain of the voyage was beginning to tell on Hughes. When the other winced from some accidental contact he would growl, "All right, don't panic, I had a shower a couple of hours ago." Three weeks

out he would say nothing, but would snarl wordlessly. Five weeks—and it was obvious to Benson that his companion had worked out for himself his philosophy of living, and that in this philosophy there was no consideration for the rights and feelings of William Benson. Hughes would call him "Bill" or "Will" or even "Willie" as the mood took him, would go out of his way to lay a friendly, infuriating arm across the other's shoulders, would contrive, when they were playing chess or cards together, that their hands should meet and touch unnecessarily. It was a macabre streak of sadism that Hughes took pleasure in.

AT last, over one of their savorless, unsatisfying meals, Benson forced himself to speak. He said, "This can't go on, Hughes."

"You should know, Willy," the other replied, deliberately misunderstanding. "You're the navigator. We're bound to hit Mars some time. Or have you goofed up and set the orbit for Pluto or Alpha Centauri?"

"You know what I mean," flared Benson. "You're going out of your way to make this trip a misery to me. Can't you see, man, that this is all far too important to be jeopardized by your crude sense of humor?"

"Or," sneered Hughes, "by your

old maid prissiness! God! If I ever make this run again I'm going to ask for a big, fat blonde—and to hell with the Mass Ratio!—instead of a spinster schoolmarm who's climbed into a pair of trousers by mistake!"

"A blonde?" Benson laughed without humor. "Whatever makes you think that any woman would put up with you for this long? You haven't shaved for all of a week, and you *smell!*"

"So I smell, do I, you little rat! Isn't that just too bad? I'll soon fix *that!*"

He released himself from the flimsy chair, floated over the light, folding table like some grotesque carnival balloon. His fork and spoon and drinking bottle drifted after him. Benson yelled, in rage and terror and fumbled with his own belt fastenings. Then the other was on him. He had no weight—but he had mass. Benson's chair splintered under him as he was forced to the deck. He kicked out wildly, and then both men were floating and struggling in mid air among the wreckage of their meal. Hughes laughed, caught with one of his big hands a gob of the nourishing, vitamin-rich paste that they had been eating, smeared it over Benson's face, began, carefully, to work it up his nostrils.

Benson went mad then. The in-

dignity of it all, the close physical contact, the acrid smell of the other's perspiration, were too much. He had a hazy memory, later, of snatching one of the drifting forks and stabbing with it at the sneering, unshaven face so close, too close, to his own. Hughes let go of him as he snatched the weapon, and then Benson's hands were around Hughes' thick throat. Benson was no weakling. When the red haze cleared from his brain he found that he was still squeezing the neck of a lifeless body.

Shuddering, he let go. He pushed the body from him, the reaction sending him drifting to one of the walls. His magnetic soles took hold of the metal surface and he stood there, ludicrously at right angles to the longitudinal axis of the ship, looking at the wreckage that he and Hughes had made of the cabin. Coiling and uncoiling, a queer, aerial snake, a tape recording drifted around the dead man's head. The videophone, Benson saw, was smashed beyond repair, its screen splintered, its cabinet kicked in. Playing cards and chessmen made a weird, surrealistic snowstorm.

"Heart failure . . ." whispered Benson, rehearsing aloud the entry that he was going to make in his log. Then—"I can do it myself. It will be better. They should nev-

er have sent more than one man on this expedition."

LAUGHING a little wildly he went to the locker where the two space suits were stored. He got his own out, struggled into the clumsy garment. He put on the helmet and then, after having made all secure, pulled and snapped on the thick gloves. A carefully controlled leap brought him to the floating body, which he threw from him to the deck. Even through his gloves—asbestos, rubberized fabric and metal mesh—he could feel the flesh of the other. He gulped with a spasm of nausea. "Not for much longer..." he muttered.

He kicked off from the deck-head, landed a foot or so from the body of Hughes. Grimacing with distaste he stood the dead man up so that his shoes anchored him to the deck, then opened the little hatch leading to the airlock. He pulled the body into the small compartment after him, shut the hatch.

His hands clumsy in their gloves, he fumbled with the controls of the door. He must, he knew, open it fast so that the puff of air exploding into emptiness would blow Hughes out and clear. His body would wander forever around the Sun in its own orbit or, possibly, in the fullness of time to flash, a

briefly incandescent meteorite, through the atmosphere of some planet—perhaps even Earth herself. Once rid of Hughes, however, Benson didn't give a damn what happened to his body.

The controls of the door were stiff. It had not been used since the two men made their inspection of the hull shortly after their departure from Lunar Base. Wrestling with the reluctant wheels and levers, goaded to desperate exasperation by the mule-like stubbornness of simple machinery, Benson forgot about the advantageous positioning of the corpse, about his own safety. When the door at last opened, the soft explosion of air tore the magnetic soles of his boots from the deck and only his desperate grip on a handwheel saved him from being blown into the void. Something caught him a heavy blow on the back—the body of Hughes. Benson screamed, the wild idea flashing through his mind that the dead man would take him with him. He struggled madly to clear the lifeless body from his own, madly and with much wasted effort. He was drenched with sweat as, at last, he stood and watched the corpse drift out and out, spinning slowly, one side brightly illumined by the Sun, the other in deep shadow.

He went back inside the ship. Removing only his gloves and his

helmet he got out one of the two emergency bottles of brandy and gulped down a good third of the contents. He remembered to replace the cork. Then, still in his spacesuit, he drifted into a state that was part drunkenness, part collapse and part sleep.

When, some six hours later, he awoke, unrefreshed, and went to the control room he discovered that the body of Hughes had not been given escape velocity relative to the ship but, following a synergic curve, had become a satellite.

BENSON now thought of squandering reaction mass to escape from the mute, horrible evidence of his crime. Having reduced the mass of the ship by at least two hundred pounds he could afford to use an ounce or so of precious propellant. But common sense told him the death, and jettison, of Hughes increased the chances for success of the expedition. The use of fuel for his own private ends would hamper that success. Even if Hughes—a counterpart of the Ancient Mariner's albatross—were to follow him all the way to Mars he would not use a spoonful of water to get rid of him. In any case, there were other, more economical ways.

He considered these.

The most simple would be to go outside, to leap from the hull of the ship to make contact with the body of Hughes. He could then throw Hughes from him so that the reaction would drive him, Benson, back to the safety of *Ad Astra*. It would be a risky operation—but to a cool, experienced man little more risky than crossing a normally busy street. It would involve, however, grappling with the corpse, and, even though he would be wearing his space suit, Benson's flesh crawled at the thought.

Another way would be to go outside armed with a line and grapnel. Hughes could be hooked, brought in and then thrown out. There was, however, the same drawback as before. He would have to touch Hughes. He would have to *touch* Hughes. *For the last time*, he thought. Then—*But why should I? Why should I?* His pencil doodled idly on the scratch pad on the chart table. He thought, *If this goes on, I shall be shooting myself . . . Shoot . . . That's it!*

For a few minutes he sat at the desk, considering ways and means. Unnoticed, the body of Hughes drifted into view, drifted out of sight. Benson unsnapped the buckles of his belt, made his way clumsily but swiftly from the control room, through the cabin to

the storeroom. He found one of the two revolvers that the ship carried—contingencies against possible dangerous life forms that might exist on Mars. He broke open a carton of ammunition, loaded all the chambers of the weapon. *But why*, he asked himself, *waste five good rounds? It is conceivable that they might make all the difference between success and failure once I have made my landing . . .* He broke the revolver, unloaded it, reloaded with only one cartridge. He found the coil of one inch nylon with the grapnel that was standard equipment whenever a party of men was working outside a ship in space. There was, of course, a similar coil of line already fast to his suit. The end of this he would bend to one of the eyebolts on the hull placed there for that purpose. He found a length of light, strong twine.

All this equipment he put into the airlock, then went back into the cabin to put on his space suit. He clambered back into the airlock and, this time, used the valves to exhaust the air from the little compartment before opening the door. Stepping cautiously, careful to maintain the contact of his magnetic soles with the metal skin of the ship, he went outside. He looked around him, awed but not frightened, savoring the cleanness, the emptiness, the loneliness of it

all. His trained, navigator's eye picked out the Earth, and Mars, both of them mere stars among the stars.

He unhooked the coil of line from his belt. He snapped the catch on the free end fast to a convenient ringbolt. He stood with the other coil, that with the grapnel attached, in his gloved hands, waiting for Hughes' orbit to bring him into a convenient position. He threw the grapnel, watched the spidery, whirling arms of it gleaming silvery in the sunlight. The first time he missed, had to wait for the body to come round again. The second time he missed. The third time the grapnel caught in Hughes' clothing, and the tug of the line pulled Benson away and clear from the ship's hull. Holding the one inch nylon with one hand, he gave his own safety line a tug with the other, drifted back to his little, man-made world. The body of Hughes followed him.

BENSON tried not to look at the dead man's face, stood him, held by his magnetic soles to the hull, so that his back was towards him. Avoiding contact with the rigid form as much as possible he pushed the pistol through Hughes' belt.

Using some of the twine, he tried to lash the revolver more securely to the belt but found that with his

hands in their thick gloves, this was impossible. Besides, all his attempts involved further hateful physical contact with the corpse. He abandoned the idea with a sigh of relief, contrived to throw a clumsy but secure clove hitch around the trigger of the pistol. He stepped back, muttering, "And that's the last time that I have to touch *you* . . . And now," he laughed, "for the finishing touch!"

He threw the end of the twine over the dead man's shoulder and then, walking carefully, made his way around him until he was facing him. He tried not to notice the dark, crystalline blood around mouth and nose and ears, the burst eyeballs. He caught the end of the twine and tugged. Nothing happened. The lead could have been better or, perhaps, the trigger of the revolver might have been caught by a fold of cloth. Impatient to get it all over, reluctant to waste time in examining the cause of the failure, he tugged again, harder. And again.

He did not, of course, hear the explosion of the cartridge. But as Hughes' body shot away from the hull like a miniature rocket, he felt the sharp tug on his safety line and horror filled his eyes as he saw the cord sever as the bullet tore through it. The end of the line whipped crazily, and as Hughes' body shot past, the line

wound tightly around the dead man's foot, like the end of a live bull whip.

Benson screamed in sudden terror, and the sound of his own voice deafened him in the confines of his space helmet. He felt a sharp pull then, and suddenly he was shooting away from the ship, in tow with Hughes.

He fought desperately to free himself from the dead man. But all he succeeded in doing was drawing himself closer to Hughes. And as he struggled, the dead man's body turned in space and he was staring into the blood crusted face, the hideous burst eyeballs.

Benson twisted his face away from the gruesome sight, looking back toward the *Ad Astra*. The ship was a dwindling dot in the void, growing smaller with each passing second.

"No!" He screamed. "No! I won't die like this! I won't—"

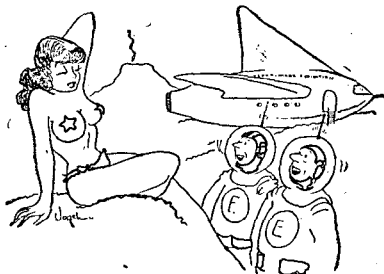
With a fascinated horror his gaze drew back to Hughes. As he looked at the frozen death-mask it seemed to him that Hughes was laughing. Laughing over some joke. A grim, terrible kind of humor.

They drifted closer together then, and Benson felt the dead man's body nudge gently against him. He screamed again, his face inches away from Hughes' ghastly staring eye sockets.

He screamed and he screamed. And the minutes passed. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knew he had one hour's air supply in his space suit. A strange thought, and yet, somehow, an important one. One hour in which to die. One hour to feel the corpse nudge him gently every few minutes; one hour to stare into that grim, blood-crusted face.

He had lost his sanity long before the hour was up . . .

THE END



"What's the matter, didn't you boys ever see a Martian before?"

LESSON FOR TODAY

By

Joel Nydahl

With the world destroyed around them, Helen wondered why she and Robbie were still left alive. There must be a reason—and of course, there was . . .

"While we remain in our invisible space-ship, the inhabitants of this world cannot see us. Prepare to take notes now in preparation for your final exam on the subject Alien Creatures and Their Actions in Given Situations. Notice below us the female of the dominant Species. She is with her child . . ."

CLUTCHING Robbie in her arms and holding him tight, Helen Thompson sat down wearily on the ground. The cold and dampness was all around her, boring through the thin cotton dress she wore. Her flesh was cold and her dark brown hair hung in ringlets over her forehead. She wore no shoes. She had lost them miles back, near the ruins at the edge of Chicago. Her feet were blistered

and bleeding, numb now from the cold of early morning.

Carefully she put her sleeping child on the ground for a moment as she rubbed her feet trying to restore circulation. Slowly feeling came back and then she flinched as pain shot up her legs.

She picked up the child and started again, heading westward.

* * *

"See the way she tries to protect her young; cradling it in her arms, shielding it from the coldness with her own body."

* * *

Now the sun was higher in the sky. The cold was gone now. But still there was something surrounding her, enclosing her, almost like a prison wall. Yet she could not see it.

Radiation!



Radiation from the long exploded bombs. It poisoned the air. It killed all vegetation. It killed all the animals. All except the two of them, the woman and her child. It had spared them. Not because it wanted to, but because it had to. Vaguely she remembered . . .

SHE and Robbie had been sitting in a Chicago park when the first bomb dropped. It fell quite near them, about three miles away. She remembered the bright blinding flash. Above them the branch of a tree cracked. It fell to a point twenty feet over their heads. Then it stopped. It was as if some force held it back. The force, whatever it was, also held back the heat. But it didn't stop her from fainting in terror.

When she regained consciousness, the burned and broken city lay all around them. Buildings were fused together. Everywhere was destruction. Everywhere *except* around she and Robbie. There, the grass was green and flowers grew. At the edge where the green ended and the black began, there was a pile of rubbish piled up *as if leaning against something*. She picked up a stick nearby and threw it. It reached the point where the green stopped and then it too stopped, *in the middle of the air*. Finally it fell to the ground.

She arose and walked over to where the stick lay. She extended her hand a few feet in front of her, and touched something. Something tangible, yet she could not see it. And no matter how hard she pushed, she could not extend her hand beyond a given point.

A dome was covering them and protecting them!

For weeks she and Robbie stayed under the dome while the wind took some of the radiation away. Each morning, when they awoke, a package of food lay by their side. Strange food, food they had never tasted or seen before. *Alien food.*

They had been spared by — what?

The puzzling thoughts spun in her mind. *Why* were they being spared? *Who* was sparing them?

Then one day, weeks after the bombs dropped, the dome disappeared. She could not see it disappear, but she knew that it was gone for the pile of ash that had leaned against it fell to the ground.

Then she started out with but one thought in mind. *I must find Johnny!* Across country she went, through small towns filled with death.

She walked, with Robbie stumbling along at her side, his small face wide with wonder and fear. Her heart ached as she looked into his staring eyes, while an occasional whimper left his lips. “. . .

mommy, where's Daddy? Where is he, mommy?"

She gripped his hand tighter and continued to walk, each mile a numb and crazy nightmare.

* * *

"Now take note of the setting the aliens are in. It took careful planning for our scientists to devastate the planet's surface as you now witness."

* * *

It was late afternoon when Helen stopped to rest by a seared oak tree. Robbie had been walking beside her. Suddenly he turned and looked up at her. "Mommy, why are we walking so far? I'm tired of walking. I don't want to walk any more. Where is daddy?"

"Hush, dear. We're going to find daddy." She knew they would never find him . . . alive. But something made her keep going. Something inside wouldn't let her turn back. *She had to know . . .*

"We've got to find daddy so he'll make everything right again, don't we?"

She hesitated before answering. "Yes—yes that's it. We've got to find daddy so he can help us—and make everything right again!"

"Oh."

"Go to sleep, Robbie. You've got to rest."

"But I'm hungry."

"Sleep, dear. We'll eat . . .

later." She kissed him, sat on the ground beside him and rocked his head in her weary arms.

* * *

"For those of you students who do not understand the languages of this planet, I'll interpret. She was trying to comfort her young one, telling him that his father was going to make everything right again when they found him. While inwardly she knew they would never find him alive. Primitive peoples often react to disasters in this way, making themselves and others around them believe things that are not true."

* * *

SLOWLY Helen opened her eyes. She sat up slowly, taking in the scene around her. She sat that way for a moment, thinking, her mind far from there, somewhere in southern France, where her aunt and uncle were. She wondered if—

"Robbie," she whispered. She nudged his shoulder gently, trying to awaken him. Finally his eyes opened. He smiled wistfully.

"Get up, dear. We've got to be going now."

"I'm hungry."

"I know. So am I. We'll find something to eat pretty soon. You will have to wait."

"But—" Tears came to his eyes. One ran down his dirty cheek, making a rivulet.

"Please Robbie," she pleaded. "Don't cry. Remember what daddy always said, 'A smile blocks up the tears.'" He smiled weakly. "Now buck up," she added. She took his hand and they started walking.

* * *

"Reading her mind, I see that she is more concerned over her child's welfare than her own. This is very unusual in primitive races."

* * *

They entered a small town. Down the main street they walked. The town was deserted, but showed no sign of being bombed or burned. In the street, numerous automobiles were parked. But she saw no people . . .

They entered a restaurant. Inside, the tables and chairs were in good order except for a half inch of dust and a few dirty dishes. She inspected the kitchen and found what she had been looking for. Canned food.

"Robbie," she called. "Where are you?"

She walked back to the door of the kitchen and looked into the restaurant. Robbie was not there . . . Then she saw him through the restaurant windows, standing on the street outside. She called "Robbie—I've found some food!"

Robbie turned, his small face twisted with hunger. He started back toward the door.

She returned to the kitchen and looked for a can opener.

* * *

"We will drop down a few hundred feet and pick up the young one with our magnetic-force-field. We shall examine him."

* * *

One moment Robbie was standing at the restaurant door, and the next he was floating upward in the middle of the air. There was a strange sensation in his stomach. He was scared. He started to cry.

* * *

"Notice the noise he makes with his mouth. This is not a form of communication, but rather he is using a primitive form of expressing his thoughts, which is called crying. Reading his mind, I find only confusion and fear. He wonders where he is, but knows that he doesn't like it."

"Another interesting fact about these aliens is that they feel pain. It is hard to understand and even harder to explain. But I will try. We are aware of touching something or somebody only as a sensation on the skin. These people have more than that. Now watch. As I cut the skin of this young one slightly, notice that he jerks and screams louder. He is feeling pain. It is a strong sensation that leaves a sharp impression on the brain. That does not fully explain it, but it is the best I can

do along with this demonstration."

* * *

"OH, good God! Robbie! What happened, honey. What happened?" Then she saw the blood dripping on the floor. "Robbie, your arm!"

Then he was in her arms, sobbing hysterically. "I—I . . . they took me, and cut me—and . . ." but he could go no further.

Carefully, she laid him on a table and examined his arm. The bleeding had subsided some. She took a clean wet cloth and wiped off the blood. Then she bandaged it.

Robbie had stopped sobbing now, but the tears were still coming. She tried to get the story of what had happened to him, but what she did hear, she didn't believe.

After he finished she said, "Now, Robbie, I can't believe that you were lifted into the air by a spaceship, tied to a table and cut in the arm by some monster!"

"But Mommy, that's what happened. Honest! And when I was laying on the table I heard them talking. But I couldn't understand what they were saying!"

A grimness filled her as he spoke. And then a terrible horror spread through her. She remembered the Chicago park, when the bombs fell—how they alone seemed to be spared death . . . *Was it possible? . . .*

She grabbed Robbie into her arms and dashed up the street away from the restaurant. She saw a car standing by the curb and ran to it. There were keys in the ignition. She put Robbie on the front seat and got in. As the motor coughed into life she meshed gears and sped out of the town. One thing buzzed in her mind. *Peoria—that's where Johnny is—oh, Johnny—help us!*

* * *

"The conveyance in which you now see them is called an automobile. It is propelled by a liquid fuel, gasoline, in an internal combustion engine. We purposely had the automobile left there for them."

* * *

She drove through the industrial section of Peoria. She knew she was near the factory where Johnny worked. She started looking for the building, thinking how unfair it was for Johnny to have taken a job so far from Chicago. But her heart lifted as she thought about her husband. *Johnny — Johnny, we're here!*

There! To her left. There it was! She stopped the car, took Robbie's hand and ran toward the building.

"Mommy, is this where daddy is? Is he here?" Robbie's voice trembled.

She nodded her head as they ran. "Yes, Robbie — daddy's

here!"

She reached the building. The door was open and they stepped inside.

She was breathless now. Johnny—so close . . . She led Robbie to the stairs and her knees shook as they went up. "Johnny! Johnny!" she called, her voice close to hysteria.

But there was only silence.

She ran down the hall on the second floor, pulling Robbie with her, heard him sobbing. Then she saw the door and the gold letters on it. JOHN THOMPSON.

"Robbie, stay here." She hesitated. Her hands were cold and clammy. She was trembling.

She shoved open the door.

She screamed.

There on the floor lay a body. It had once been a man. Now there was only a skeleton of bleached white bones. Then she saw it. On the ring finger of his right hand. A gold ring with silver letters on black onyx. Johnny's . . .

Then she was running and screaming. Screaming and running. Down the stairs and out the door. Behind her Robbie followed, crying, terror in his small eyes.

She collapsed on the ground, her body shaking with sobs. Robbie fell beside her.

She put her arms around him, clutched his body to her. "Oh, Robbie," she cried. "You're the only thing I have left in the world. I love you. Don't leave me. Don't ever leave me." She snuggled him closer to her.

Then she looked at his face. She gave a little cry in her throat. She looked closer. Covering his skin were small red sores. What was it she had once read in a book? — Something about radiation poisoning—red sores appearing just before death—

"No, Robbie! Oh, no!"

He looked up at her, his eyes hot and feverish. He tried to talk but the words bubbled on his lips.

She pressed him to her breast and rocked him, shaking her head. "No, Robbie! Don't leave me! . . ."

She felt the beating of his heart against hers. Slower. His small body twitched. Then grew silent.

. . . She sat there on the ground, holding the still form in her arms long after the sun had set. The Moon shone down with a silver glow, bathing the child's dead body in its soft light. It shone in the woman's eyes too, glazed eyes, with a dead mind behind them . . .

* * *

"That concludes our lesson for today."

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Brain Machine



THE encephalograph is nothing more than a radio-type amplifier of high sensitivity, capable of detecting and recording the electrical activity to which the brain is constantly subject. It now appears that this curious instrument may reveal a lot more about the human mind than has been known, particularly since a regular program has been arranged whereby people from all walks of life—from the genius to the mentally deficient—are having encephalograms made.

Essentially the machine shows a picture of a series of waves whose

shapes change constantly depending on the ability and the condition of the mind being tested. As more is learned of the relationship between the electrical waves and the type of mind producing them, it seems that a correlation can be noted, and, predictions made.

It is going too far at present to say that the encephalograph can detect genius or prescribe occupation, but with refinements there is a definite possibility that in the future it may do something very akin to this. The mind will not always be a mystery!



"Here we go again!"

The Big Cheese

By

Edward Wellen

A "rat," being synonymous with "villain," gave Brownie delusions of grandeur. For he was the Real McCoy—aspiring to rule the world! . . .

A GAIN and again the pinball machine went score-happy. And when Brownie ran up top score for the 214th time in a row I began to smell a rat. A large oily-brown rat. I watched him closely on the 215th try.

He went through the complicated procedure of earning a slug, putting it in the slot, maneuvering the plunger. And again he made a perfect score and his reward of a piece of cheese chuted out. He began to nibble, pausing once to wink at me. And that resolved my last doubt: Brownie *was* using body english.

Brownie was quite a cuss. *Rattus norvegicus*, to be exact. He was the product of selective breeding, scion of myriads of rodent martyrs to science. But breeding, though it accounted for his extra-

ordinary size, was hardly the answer to his miraculous I.Q. Brownie was a mutant. Or was he? Sometimes I think something out of space inhabited Brownie. Whatever the cause, the effect was becoming more and more apparent as the tests progressed.

"Brownie," I said reproachfully, "you tilted the machine."

Brownie looked shocked at the accusation.

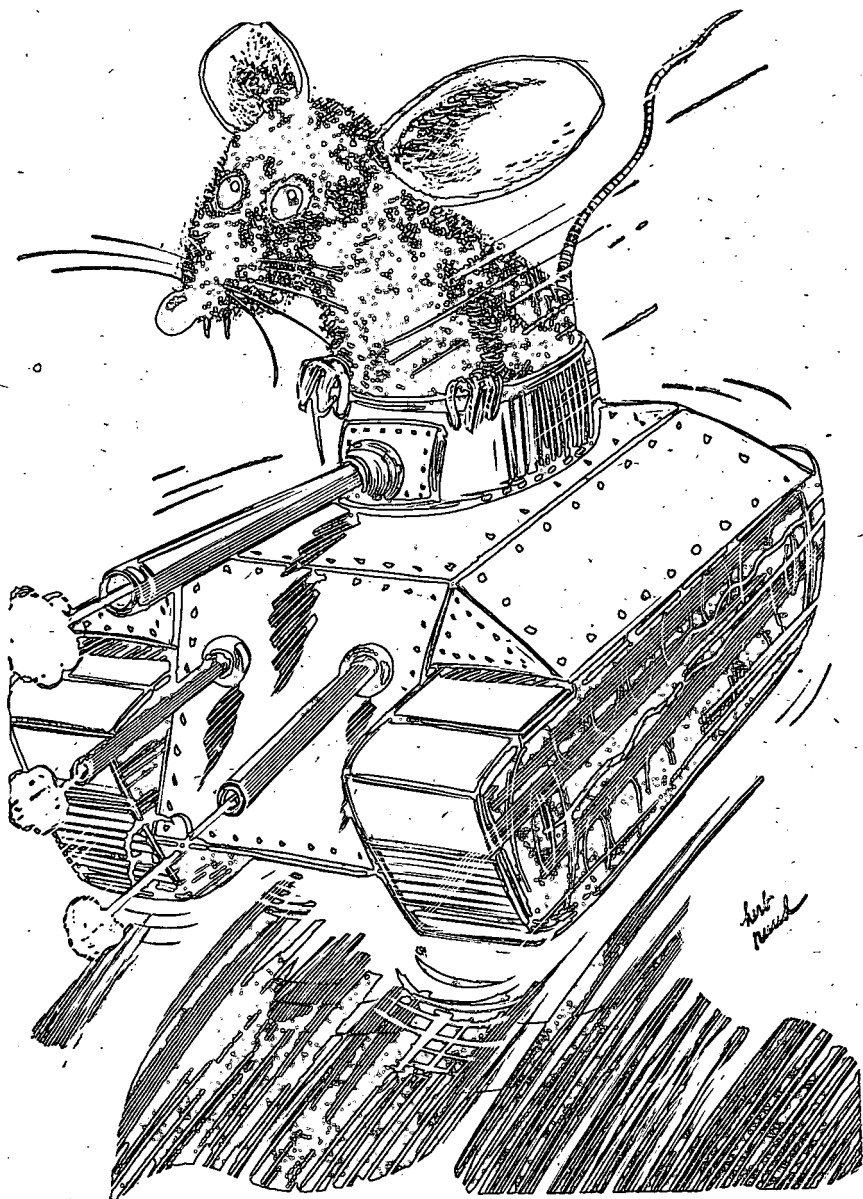
"Who, me?" he chalked on his slate.

"I don't mean the rat in Lillian Russell's hair."

The doorbell rang.

Brownie went into a boxer's crouch. He knew it always got a laugh.

But this time I said, "Save it, sport." Under my breath, as I went to open the door, I said,



"And I do mean sport. Biological sport."

"What's that you're muttering in your beard?" Isabel asked, after she'd kissed my clean-shaven face.

"It's Brownie," I said.

"What's Brother Rat been up to now?"

"He's cheating at pinball."

"Well, what do you expect when you corrupt animal morals with your gambling devices? What do you think the A.S.P.C.A. would have to say about that if they knew? By the way, dear, how much longer are you going to keep Brownie under wraps?"

"I guess I can't keep him on ice much longer, honey," I said. "As it is, I've taken a big chance keeping him here at home instead of in the school lab."

Isabel looked at Brownie. He raised his eyes from his comic book and gazed at her unblinkingly. Isabel shivered and moved closer to me.

"He scares me," she whispered. "It isn't *right* for a rat to read and write."

I looked at Brownie absorbed in his comic book again. And I had to admit that Isabel had something there.

"It is a blow to human pride," I said. "But think of what it will mean to the theory of evolution. And think of what it will

mean to get a rat's-eye view of man. And—"

"And think what it'll mean to us if we miss the ski train," Isabel said.

I looked at my watch.

"Gosh!" I said. "I'll be right with you." I walked over to Brownie's cage. "Listen, Brownie," I told him, "I'm going away on a long weekend. There's plenty of cheese in the machine and all the water you want. Okay?"

Brownie nodded and we beat it.

In the dining-car, Isabel asked, "Doesn't your Rodent Scholar rate a menu like this instead of just cheese and water?"

I watched the poles flicker past.

"To tell the truth, Isabel," I said, "I feel Brownie can get out of his cage whenever he wants to. I think he's been nipping at the Scotch I keep locked in the cabinet."

We were mostly silent until the train mounted the hills. Then the sight of snow whitewashed our minds.

BUT our minds darkened geometrically as the poles stepped off the miles back to town. In unspoken agreement we headed straight for my house.

Brownie wasn't in his cage. The cage wasn't. Brownie had dismantled the equipment and cannibalized it into something else.

A miniature tank, strangely resembling a pinball machine, rumbled toward us as we entered. And the small cannon set in the turret motioned us over against the wall.

The tank backed off. The lid lifted and Brownie popped up. He had on a battle helmet, *nee* stainless steel pot.

"Brownie," I said, "what's the big idea?"

He pointed to my left. And I noticed a message lettered on the wall.

"Your girl friend will come with me," it said. *"She'll be all right if you do as I say. Don't move. I'll be back soon."*

"Now, wait a minute, Brownie," I said.

But his head disappeared and the lid clanged shut. And the tank began to roll. The way the gun drew a bead on Isabel's heart drew beads from my forehead.

"Better humor him, honey," I said.

Brownie marched Isabel out. I started to follow. But the gun turret spun around and a slug whizzed past my head. I advanced in the other direction.

All I could do was wait until he returned. No! There were things I could do in the meantime. What? Well, if Brownie intended to use my home as his base of operations, he might soon-

er or later sample my Scotch again. I spiked the Scotch with rat poison. What else? Of course, the police!

The voice of a desk veteran answered the phone.

"Fourteenth precinct. Sergeant Martin."

"Sergeant, a rat kidnapped my girl!"

"Calm down, mister. Now give me the facts. Who, where, when. What's this guy look like?"

I told him.

"A *real* rat, huh? And he's in a little armored car? And he's dangerous? I see. Well, you just sit tight, mister. I'm giving the case to Detective Cann' right away."

I got sore. I have cop friends and so I know "Detective Cann" is cop talk for the wastebasket. I blistered the wires.

"Calm down, mister . . ." The voice was going on but I wasn't listening.

Nosing around the door was the snout of the gun mounted on Brownie's tank. I hung up. The tank swung into the room and rolled to a stop.

When Brownie showed himself again, I asked, "What have you done with Isabel?"

BROWNIE pointed to a stack of leaves torn from a calendar. They were face-down. On

the back of the top one was the answer to my question:

"The girl is a hostage. She is in a safe place."

"What ransom do you want? Cheese? I'll give you all the cheese you want, Brownie."

The answer to that was on the second leaf: "I want you to help me raise and train an army of Rats."

The third leaf said: "The girl dies if you refuse."

The fourth leaf said: "I mean to rule the world."

Those damned comic books! Plainly, I had to scotch his plans now.

"Okay, Brownie," I said. "Let's drink on it." I unlocked the cabinet and took out the Scotch.

I filled a shot glass for Brownie and set it on the floor. I moved away and poured a glass for myself. Brownie waited for me to drink first.

I took a deep breath and drank. Brownie stepped out of the tank. He sipped his drink, keeping his beady eyes on me. I let him empty the glass before I spoke.

"Brownie, that drink was poisoned." And as I said the words I felt the poison work on me,

twisting my insides. Brownie got it then, too. His twitching body and whipping tail showed it. I was in agony. "Brownie, if you tell me where Isabel is I'll give you an antidote."

Giddily, Brownie found chalk and scrawled on the floor, "How do I know it's not more poison?"

"I'll take a dose of it myself," I said.

"All right," he wrote.

Quickly I got an emetic and swallowed a dose. For a bad moment I was sick all over the place. Then I felt better.

"Now," I said weakly, "tell me where she is."

"Tied - to - tree - in - woods - behind - house - quick - the - antidote!"

I gave Brownie the emetic. I'd promised it to him.

He drank it, then scurried back to the tank. Holding me off with the gun, he chalked on the turret: "You fool! Now you die. Nothing will stop me—"

Brownie doubled up in pain.

"Rats can't vomit," I said. "This is it, you rat."

Brownie looked at me. "You man," he wrote, and died.

THE END

IMAGINATION IS GOING MONTHLY!

That's Right — Effective with the June Issue (on sale April 28th)

Madge will appear every 4 weeks!

DON'T FORGET—WITH THE JUNE ISSUE—RESERVE YOUR COPY EVERY MONTH!



Nature's Equation



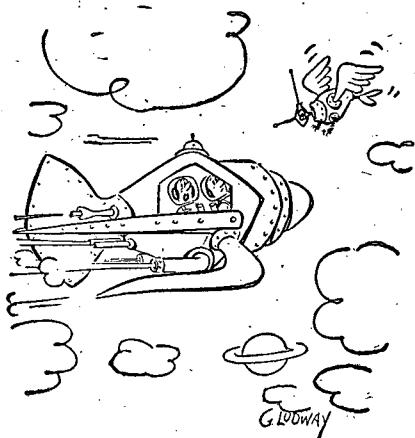
NO psychologist ever has explained adequately the mingled respect and repulsion the average person feels toward mathematics. Perhaps it is a carry-over from the mysticism associated with numbers from earliest times. Whatever the case this attitude is slowly changing, mainly because we are living in a technological age which can only be described properly in terms of the cabalistic symbols so dear to the mathematician!

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the differential equations of modern engineering and physics. "Differential equation" is an impressive sounding term for what simply amounts to a relationship between *rates* and

quantities which vary. All Nature and all man-made artifacts are in a constant state of flux and change and of course where you have change you have rates. Miles per hour, gallons per minute, hours per day—these all fit into familiar algebraic equations with a slight difference. They come out as differential equations and with them, men conquer time and space and energy.

The next time you see a ball thrown in the air, remember that a neat differential equation describes its motion no less accurately than a variant of that, "Nature's equation", describes the path of the Earth around the Sun!

* * *



"I thought it was about time we were seeing signs 'of life!'"



Conducted by Mari Wolf

THERE'S a movement under way in science fiction fandom right now that to me seems one of the most valuable and vital in a long time. It's called Project Fan Club. I've mentioned it before in these columns, but now I'd like to let it speak for itself. Because I know it will be of interest to many of you, both to those already active in fan activities and to those who wish there were some way of starting a club of their own and making it successful.

And I'm going to let Orville Mosher tell you about it, because it was his idea originally, and he, together with his co-members, are the ones who're doing all of the work and spending all of the time necessary to bring the Project to you. Orville Mosher says too that he'll be glad to answer any fan club problems free of charge—and you certainly wouldn't be getting just

one fan's opinions. You'd be getting the advantage of all the research that's gone into the Project.

As for what that is, I'll now let Orville himself tell you . . .

* * *

How Project Fan Club Got Started: It was over a year and a half ago that Shelby Vick and I were Wirezponding together. (Corresponding by wire-recorder.) I mentioned that I would like to start a fanclub, but I didn't know how to get started, and once started what problems I would encounter. You see, I was a Scout Master of a Boy Scout troop at the time, and believe me, I was always running into some problem. I went on to say that somebody ought to write a booklet on how to form a science fiction club.

Shelby's reply: "Why not do one yourself, Orville?"

That did it. We continued to

send wires back and forth. The idea began to look better and better, even though I seldom mentioned it.

Finally I decided to do something about it.

It was Nan Gerding who suggested the name PROJECT FAN CLUB to me. She casually referred to our "fanclub project," so I coined the words and started using "Project Fanclub" with reference to what we were doing. PROJECT FAN CLUB came to mean the movement to collect material on fanclubs and assemble it in a booklet for the benefit of fanclubs. This now refers to my test-tubes. (those who send me a report on their club and receive help as they need it), to the filling out of questionnaires, to advertisement of the movement, to the movement as a whole.

It occurred to me that I had missed several important points, for I discovered that there was a lot more to a fanclub than what was covered in the questionnaire. Up to the questionnaire all that was necessary was to tell how to form, operate a fanclub, and some of the problems involved. Some of the answers did not fit in the questionnaire. I mimeographed a letter of my own to cover some of the things I wanted.

Project Fan Club Materials: I have a card file which lists the names and addresses of about two hundred fanclubs in the United States, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, England, Australia, Africa, Wales, and—I guess that's all. Many of these clubs have not answered. In some cases I have duplicates, in some cases the fanclub no longer ex-

ists. I use this card file for recording all fanclubs I come across. It is also used to locate those who have filled out questionnaires or are entitled to the booklet.

In a three-ring notebook I copy down the answers to the questionnaire. It is set up in the order of the questionnaire itself. This way I have a quick reference to any information I want, and it will help in the final booklet. I am considering setting up the booklet according to the questionnaire with all the answers to the particular question listed under that question as was given. (By the way, I am giving credit for each individual answer on the questionnaire.)

I HAVE a letter file which is used when I haven't the time to copy the material into the notebook. A small box holds my unanswered mail (20 letters are crammed in it at present.)

I have a large supply of: "A member of: Project Fan Club" stickers, which will go to those who are to receive a booklet by virtue of their help.

Project Fan Club Cooperation: Aside from offering suggestions and ideas over problems of the local, regional, state, national, international, wire-recorder, tape recorder, etc., Science-Fiction clubs, we have gone out of our way to give added help. The Nor-West Science Fantasy Club of England was holding a MANCON (Manchester Convention) and was in need of prozines. We contacted various other clubs who helped donate prozines for it. Other times a fan would like to find a fan club, and that

information is given. A bit of information has been supplied to some fen who were interested in putting out a fanzine, and not in a club. We are interested in encouraging the formation of fan-clubs, so we help where we can.

Interesting Letters: All letters are interesting, but some stand out in my memory more than others for one reason or another. For this reason and others, Project Fan Club is the most fascinating. Take for instance a one lined letter which bore the caption "The Junior Flying Saucer League of Investigations." It read: "Dear sir, Am starting a saucer zine. Now what?"

Richard Elsberry must have been in a gay mood when he filled out my questionnaire from the answers I received. (By the way, I am including Rich's answer in my booklet.) To give several illustrations: WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO JOIN THE CLUB IN THE FIRST PLACE?: "I haven't the faintest idea. I received the director's name through devious means. A red-head. WHAT WOULD YOU TELL A REPORTER ABOUT YOUR MEETINGS, AND WHAT WOULD YOU SHOW HIM?: "We would tell him less than nothing and show him Cogswell's still. Then, after getting him thoroughly drunk, we would write the column for him, shove it in his pocket, and toss him out of a speedily moving car in front of the newspaper office. Think I'm kiddin'?" WHAT METHODS DO YOU USE TO GET MEMBERS THAT SHOW UP VERY SELDOM TO COME TO MEETINGS?: "If they won't come to meetings we descend on

their houses in waves. This usually scares the delinquent member's wife, and she forces her husband to attend all future meetings. This does not work on Boggs. He is not married." HOW IS RESPONSIBILITY DISTRIBUTED?: "Everyone blames everyone else."— And so it goes.

Honey Wood told of her club's picnic and what they did. It rained that day, so the picnic was held indoors. With the help of a tape recorder, and a contest, the picnic became a success.

Norman G. Browne suggested collecting material on the different types of fen that one runs across in fandom. Take for instance the type that lifts a religion out of a prozine and believes in it. Norman, by the way, based part of his fanzine (Vanitions) on my questionnaire. Norm also suggested an aptitude test for club members based on fan potential. Norman believes that the true fan cooperates with other fen and is active in fandom — whereas one who collects, or just reads prozines and does not share with fandom at large is not a fan. Many clubs have folded because of square pegs in round holes, and a fan aptitude test would help to place the fan where he would do the most good. I plan to work with Norman on his idea after my booklet has been mimeoed.

Anti-Fanclubs: Several fen hold the view that much more and better things can be done by the fan by himself than by a club. The chief reason for the break-ups is the apathy of the members. Some are always glad to tell you how to do a

thing, but are down on you if you don't do it their way—they themselves would not take the responsibility for doing it.

In the cases of clubs that have folded, I try to learn exactly what happened and what could have been done to prevent the break-up.

Project Fan Club Booklet: The booklet will have just as much illustrative material as I can fit in. For instance, the various applications, club constitutions, copies of posters, slip-ins for advertisement in prozines, newspaper stories on fancubs, club newspapers. Things that tell about how things worked out, say like how a club wrote up each meeting and sent it in to the local paper and the results. (I will print a portion of the news sheet of the Canadian Science Fiction Association which tells about one of the member clubs. Also, I will print an activity requirement program and the results of it. (A complete flop, by the way.)

In one case I will not devote much time. This subject is the fanzine. The whole subject is too broad to go into thoroughly. It will not be neglected in the booklet because it is a factor. *Probably* some of the things that will be discussed about fanzines will be finding material for the zine, attaching a drawing from one stencil to another, getting the best results from the hectograph, printing by the mimeograph process half-sized (or quarter-sized) booklets, information about typing a stencil, and correction (or what to avoid) in mimeographing.

However, these questions are in the questionnaire and will be reproduced in the booklet: What

type of machine do you have? What materials do you need for publishing a zine and what is the approximate cost? What fanzines and prozines have fanzine reviews? What do you charge for your fanzine? What time of the year does your fanzine sell best? How many pages is your average zine? How often do you put your zine out? How many fan work to put out your zine? How do the members cooperate to put your fanzine out?

EACH answer will be credited to a fan. By this means you can trace the type of fancub. Also, if you like the ideas of this particular fan you can find his ideas easily. Each fancub has a personality of its own, so a fan wishing to start a club may pick the personality that would best fit his club. You also are able to draw a clear picture of fancubs and not run the chance of drawing wrong conclusions. For instance the question: "How are disciplinary matters handled?" This question is almost entirely neglected. The answer given by one or two fancubs would not apply to all other clubs. BUT if credit were not given, then one might jump to the conclusion all clubs act in this certain way.

To those who would like to join a particular club this method would be of great value. Many of the answers are interesting in themselves, and often have a different slant. The fan has a variety of answers to his question and can pick for himself what he considers the best.

The "where" along with the "how" is considered. Where you

can rent or buy S-F movies (or movies that would appeal to a fan.) Where your club can hold meetings. And so on.

Conflicting ideas and suggestions: As yet I have not found a completely formal fanclub. Two other kinds, the semi-formal and the completely informal, are interesting for this reason: Which is the best? Both groups seem to think theirs is.

Two different philosophies seem to compete with each other. One, the *A job for everyone*. Two, *Don't organize the club any more than is basically necessary*. Ronny D. Rentz supports the last one. To quote: "One of our members brought up the following line of thinking at a little get-together last week. 'Don't organize the club any more than is basically necessary.' He is a veteran stf fan and thinks that once a local club becomes too well organized and formal all the fun goes out of it. What do you think about that? Maybe he's got something there." On the other hand, the *A job for everyone* philosophy holds that less confusion will result, you can do more, and you can have a lot more fun without putting all the work on one person. Take your pick.

Concerning the publication of the booklet: No telling how much I will charge for a copy of the booklet. It will be just as low as I can make it. Of course those who helped with PROJECT FAN CLUB by filling out a questionnaire, or in some other way, will receive a copy free.

During January I started assembling the book in its final form. About March the booklet should be

ready, or soon thereafter.

Future plans before the booklet is published: Postcards will go out to those who have not answered requesting that they answer just as soon as possible and set a deadline. An all out campaign to have all fanclubs write in. A fanzine telling about PROJECT FAN CLUB will be mailed free to all fan we can locate.

I would appreciate any suggestions or information for the booklet. I will be glad to try and answer any fanclub problem free of charge. Any fan wishing to start a club can contact me, and I will give him what assistance I can.

* * *

Well, that's PROJECT FAN CLUB, as described to you by its originator, Orville Mosher. He and co-workers Nan Gerding, Shelby Vick and Dick Clarkson are doing a great job. Not for themselves, though I imagine they're getting a lot of pleasure out of it. But for fandom, and for all science fiction readers who'd like to be fans, but don't quite know how to get organized . . .

Orville W. Mosher's address, and that of PROJECT FAN CLUB, is 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas. How about letting him hear from you?

Now to the fanzines.

* * *

SF: 15c; Published at 9612 Second Ave., Silver Spring, Md., by the members of the Hopeful Young People's Extra-Radical Society for the Promotion of Amiable Conditions Everywhere . . . more conveniently known as HYPER-SPACE. John L. Magnus, Jr. edits

this fanzine, which started out by being very good indeed and persists in getting better and better.

The artwork is excellent. I wish I knew which of the three artists—Bill Goodell, Alden Faulkner, and Vevie Cole—had done the silk-screen cover. It's one of the most impressive jobs I've seen in a long time, and no credit line anywhere.

But the quality that appeals to me most about SF is the special humor that runs through so much of it. Rather dry, and wholly enjoyable, and if you went Pogo, you will probably like SF.

And if you like puns you'll like the column, The Wild Man. Sample, soap opera scene: "Must I neon the flourine begging you to be a good samarium and give your poor sick antimony?"

How about that? And then there's the article on The Veiled Woman subtitled, "Is that all she wore?"

John Magnus looks forward to going lithographed and giving his artists more work, and giving his readers an even better fanzine than the SF of today. Don't miss it . . .

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing 54, N.Y. Mr. Taurasi always gets the big scoops in news of interest to science fiction fandom.

Sad news of this issue is the passing of Earl K. Bergey on September 29th. More than one fan has a Bergey original in his collection. Those who do should treasure them all the more now.

A subscription to F-T will give you all the latest news, before it appears anywhere else.

* * *

VEGA: 10c; Joel Nydahl, 119 S. Front St., Marquette, Mich. I think this is something special in the way of fanzines—not because it has the best print job. It doesn't. It's hektographed, with two colors of ink. A very nice job but nothing "out of this world."

The reason I think it's something special is because Joel shows more talent than any other budding author and publisher I've seen in many a month. He has a story of his own in this second issue of his fanzine. When I say it's good I mean more than that it has a good story idea. It has that, but it also has a smoothness and a quality that should make Joel become a well known writer one of these days. I'm sure many of you will want to subscribe to Joel's fanzine.

* * *

TLMA: "The Little Monsters of America"; one dollar a year for members, and you get so much more than merely a fanzine for your dollar that you will want to join. Write to Lynn A. Hickman, 239 E. Broad St., Statesville, N.C. The names on the contents page are enough recommendation — Basil Wells, Hal Shapiro, Orma McCormick, Marion (Astra) Bradley, Wilkie Connor . . . And fifteen new members are listed in this issue.

Just glancing through, I see something extremely funny. "World War 3 will start when Joe (Stalin) says Margaret (Truman) can't sing . . ."

TLMA is one of the largest and most active of fan clubs now, with many local groups affiliated with

it, and a lot of correspondence among its members that live in different cities. Lynn and his wife Carole do a wonderful job on the fanzine, too.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 10c; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y. This is issue number 19. Rog says he remembers Bob's first issue, a small thing with almost unreadable mimeography. The current issue is a long ways up toward the top of the heap. The mimeography has the professional touch that comes from experience.

Bob publishes the results of his researches into British Reprint Editions in this issue, and it really covers everything there is to be known about the subject. Roger Dard's "Report From Australia" will be of interest to fans that have friends in the orient and "down under". And there's lots more. Twenty-five pages of interesting material, plus a poem about a radioactive train with a personality. The cover is nice too. One of Richard Z. Ward's.

* * *

STF FUNZINE: 20c; free to members of TLMA; the Napoleon Fantasy Club, with the same address as TLMA, reviewed earlier. I won't use more space for it, since TLMA was reviewed, but there is a list of members of TLMA in it. Two hundred and sixty-five names. I counted them . . .

* * *

UTOPIAN: 25c; R. J. Banks Jr., 111 S. 15th St., Corsicana, Texas, president of the Texas Fandom club. At the back of this issue are sixteen pages of prozine re-

views, and that by no means covers all the prozines. There was a time when a diligent faned could review all the prozines in two pages, but no more! Let's see what's in the other twenty-nine pages.

First, is "Fantasy Outlook" by Ev Winne, which is more about organizing a fan club. Then comes five short stories, one of which, "Backfire", by R. K. Verdan, is almost five thousand words long! The front cover is by Max Keasler.

Alan M. Grant describes two weird phonograph records he ran across. One, "Pacific 231" is of a train leaving the station, gathering momentum, and finally crashing. The other, "The Victory Ball," is more creepy. It's planned as a gay victory ball after the Civil War, but the spirits of the war dead attend . . .

* * *

RENAISSANCE: 10c; Joseph Semenovitch, 155-07 71st Ave., Flushing 67, N.Y. Bi-monthly, with articles, fiction, and poetry. In "No One Ever Proved Anything," P. Campbell presents a theory that nothing can be proven. He missed his logical punch line, however—which would be that he can't prove it. But when you get through reading his short article you may pause and wonder if two plus two does equal three—I mean five—what do I mean? I was sure what two plus two equals before I read his article . . . four . . . ?

Perhaps the best story from the standpoint of story idea is "No Variety," by Herbert Dullienner, M. D., which I suspect is a pen-name. I think it was good be-

cause I think it was a sly dig at some of the super scientific lectures that pass for stories in some of the prozines. Something about a pill that will take the place of food.

* * *

THE FEMZINE: published quarterly for the fanettes, meaning us girls, by Marian Cox, 79th A. B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowa; 15c. Written only for the female fan, Marian has decided to let any mere male who is curious subscribe to it too. So you see, none of you peeping toms have to use a girl's name when you subscribe!

When I spoke of good fiction in the other fanzines, I of course meant good in relation to other stories in the same zines. You fans will have to go some to beat Juanita Wellons' "The Hyperspace Hot-Rod," "Wild Talent," by Jean Leighton Moore is also very good, and it isn't what you might think. Jean tells of three experiences she has had since the age of sixteen, and asks if anyone can explain them. Her first was in a haunted house! The second strange experience occurred when she eighteen, in her own bedroom. She awakened and saw a little old lady crouched beside her dresser, but there was no little old lady. Figure that one out. The third is a little more in line with many stories about the war. It happened after she was married. Her husband was overseas. She dreamed she received a telegram saying he was dead. Next day a telegram actually did come, telling her he had been seriously wounded. And Marian's own story, "The Lonely Robot", is a touch-

ing little story patterned after fables.

The cover depicts three spacemen . . .

* * *

HYPHEN: price, two issues for one copy of any U. S. prozine, sent to Walt Willis, 170. Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, N. I. That's North Ireland. Walt is quite a punster, and the title of his editorial shows it. "Two Eds are Better than One . . .", the other, 'ed being Chuck Harris whose address is Carolin Lake Ave., Rainham, Essex, England. And he seems to have brought out this issue while Walt was here in the U. S. attending the convention in Chicago. Chuck slyly got Vince Clark and Bob Shaw to do most of the work, though Walt stenciled the letter column before embarking for America.

I like the cartoon depicting a school for the study of teleportation. Under a sign stating, "Novices Entrance" is a door. Under another sign stating, "Graduates Entrance" is nothing but solid wall. You'll have to get a copy to really appreciate this zine. If you have met Walt Willis you'll know what I mean. -Calm dry humor that is real humor. Keen intelligence. You'll enjoy every page.

The Ackermans and Rog and I tried to talk Walt into staying in the United States, but he was determined to return to Ireland and start a malted milk store and make a million. A malt was the one thing that impressed him most about us. He had one every time he could.

* * *

COSMAG and SFD: 50c; but after this last printed issue it goes to 10c with its reversion to mimeo format. And it's easy to understand why. Even at fifty cents they can't pay costs. Henry Burwell, Jr., 459 Sterling St. N. E., Atlanta, Ga., and Ian T. Macauley, 57 East Park Lane, N. E., Atlanta, Ga. This is two fanzines in one, all in one cover, one being upside down in relation to the other:

The Science Fiction Digest, SFD, is mostly reprints of the best of past fan publishing, and it is something very worthwhile. Too much of the best of fan literature appeared in various fanzines with a circulation of fifty, to die almost unread. "Artjay's Dilemma," by Willis Conover Jr, for example. A priceless satire from Science Fiction Critic, published in 1938.

Cosmag has a very good Mack Reynolds short story, "Judgment," which wasn't quite up to the standards of prozines. Most weird item is a factual? account of the discovery of a coffin in an old cemetery which contained the almost perfectly preserved remains of a man who had died 113 years ago. It was written by Darrell C. Richardson, who is well known to most fans as one of the largest collectors of sf and fantasy. There's more than we have space for . . .

* * *

QUANDRY #24: subscription by invitation only, which sounds high hat but isn't. Lee Hoffman had her subscriptions open to the public and got so many subscribers she couldn't handle the list. It was either suspend publication or cut it down to something more comfor-

table. Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St. Savannah, Ga., USA.

This seems to be a Bob Tucker issue. All the names on the contents page are Bob Tucker except J. T. Oliver and Hoy Ping Pong. Let's see what Hoy wrote. It's on page sixteen . . . It's a letter to Santa Claus! Mr. Pong asks Santa for a new prozine better than any on the stands, combining all their best features. But-but-but, I thought *every* new magazine that came out did that!

There's a picture of Tucker and an introduction by J. T. Oliver. And it's about time Mr. Tucker had a special issue of a fanzine. He's the book author of "The Chinese Doll", "City in the Sea," "The Long Loud Silence", plus many stories that appeared in magazines.

* *

That's all there's room for. I'll list the others for this month so that if you're curious you can send for one.

FORERUNNER: quarterly; R. Douglas Nicholson, 24 Warren Rd., Double Bay, Sydney, Australia.

PACIFIC ROCKET SOCIETY BULLETIN: on request; 428 S. Verdugo Rd., Glendale 5, Calif.

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; 1745 Kenneth Rd., Glendale 1, Calif.

UTOPIAN: no price or address can be found in it or it would have definitely been reviewed!

IF: 15c; 9612 Second Ave., Silver Spring, Md.

And that's the bottom of the box for this time. Send your fanzine to Madge for review.

—Mari Wolf

☆ Bertrand Russell Prophecies ☆

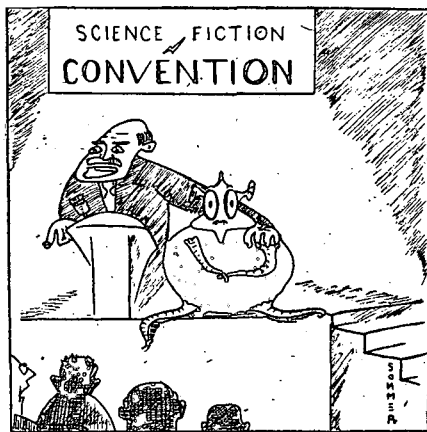
WHEN one of the world's great philosophers and mathematicians becomes a science-fiction prophet, it is time to sit up and take notice. On the anniversary of his eightieth birthday, this clear-thinking, logical and eminent mind made numerous statements about the future, statements which will appeal to any lover of s-f.

"Man will reach the Moon," Russell says confidently, "within the next decades." World government will come eventually, chemistry and physics will produce further marvels in the form of synthetic foods and materials. Race prejudice will vanish and all men will become brothers.

None of these ideas are new naturally but they bear the endorsement of a very great thinker. Lord Russell is optimistic about the future. He does not see Man destroying himself. He thinks the era of "The Great Wars" is passing, save for perhaps one more holocaust—but even this will not destroy civilization.

Bertrand Russell is astounded at the sweeping changes his eighty-year life has seen; even more astonishing to him is what will come. Even though his days are numbered, his optimism sees the world becoming as a Garden of Eden—and he is right!

* * *



"—and for his many contributions
to science fiction . . ."

Letters

from the Readers

WE'RE LOOKING AHEAD

Dear Ed:

Permit me to add my belated congratulations on the completion of a wonderful year of publication for Madge. Looking back over the issues of 1952 I can truly say it was a year in which Madge rose to the top of the list. But that's all in the past and we're into a new year.

I would like to say that IMAGINATION has started 1953 off right. In the January issue SPILLTHROUGH by Dan Galouye was tops—and in the February issue, of course, the terrific novel, EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville. Neville is fast becoming one of my favorite writers.

Incidentally, I appreciate your back cover feature; besides making the back attractive, it is informative as well. The departments are all good. I always enjoy Mari Wolf's informal chats in FANDORA'S BOX, and I disagree with Don Wilson's letter that it has too juvenile an air.

Again, Mr. Hamling, I say con-

gratulations for a job well done and keep it up in 1953.

Harland Johnson
Aberhart Memorial Sanatorium
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

We can promise you many more fine stories by Dan Galouye and Kris Neville. How do you like Dan's feature novel this month? - As to 1953, we feel that the big news of the moment is that IMAGINATION goes monthly with the June issue. Looks like the best year yet! . . .

wlh

TEEN-AGE PROTEST!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

We know that every letter usually starts out by saying "we like your magazine," which of course is true, but we'd like to start ours with a protest. If you haven't guessed, we're a couple of teen-age science fiction fans, and we'd like to know why in heaven's name must teen-age readers be referred to and reminded by stf minded adults in every magazine on the market that we do not reach the mental stand-

ard of an adult stf reader? We object!

We can understand and evaluate science fiction just as well, with just as much good taste, and probably more. "Imagination" than some of these people who are critical of us. One would get the impression that teen-age readers should have special stories written for them alone. Who is setting this intellectual standard in science fiction? It's about time somebody registered a sound protest. So there it is . . .

We've been reading IMAGINATION for a long time and we consider it tops in the market. While each of us has separate reading tastes in the field, Madge is able to satisfy us both. So a bouquet to Madge, her artists and authors—it's a good magazine, inside and out!

Gloria Litvinsky

Phyllis Miller

320 Oglethorpe St., NE

Washington, D.C.

And below, a similar objection from across country . . . with

OBJECTION SUSTAINED . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

While this is the first time I have written to a magazine of any type, I have a strong motive. I

realize that the average reader of Madge may pay absolutely no attention to whatever I say here—since I'm only fourteen years old and the majority of the populace seems to agree that "kids" don't know enough to be "heard."

I say that my thirty-five cents spends the same as anyone's, and if people are willing to allow younger readers to spend their money they should have the right to be heard as well.

My gripe in particular is the letter in the February issue by Clarence McFarland. This gentleman seems to think he is a poor man's guide to learning. After reading his letter I wonder if he is a member of a "more mature mind group" himself. It simply seems to me that either he has not much else to do but criticize, or he just enjoys seeing his name in print.

I would like to have you know that I think IMAGINATION is tops—it heads my reading list.

I also think Kris Neville did himself proud with his novel, EARTH ALERT! in the February issue.

Mike Anderson

Winghaven

Vashon, Wash.

In answer to the two letters above, a representative cross-section of others received on the subject, we'd

11th World Science Fiction Convention

THE TIME: September 5-6-7, 1953 (Labor Day Weekend). THE PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—Bellevue Stratford Hotel. THE PROGRAM: Banquet, costume ball and many other gala festivities for all fans. GUEST OF HONOR: Willy Ley, internationally famed science writer. MEMBERSHIP: \$1.00—send to 11th World STF Convention, Box 2519, Philadelphia 3, Pa. Members receive all Progress Reports—join NOW!

like to reiterate a view we put forth in our editorial for the November 1951 issue. At that time we were speaking about the so-called "adult" trend in stf—the effort to educate via stf, rather than entertain. We felt then, and we feel the same now, that age is no intellectual dividing line in science fiction. As we stated then, "we feel that the readers (of any age group) are a lot smarter than the critics give them credit for being." As a matter of fact we have always held that any reader of stf is in a relatively higher intelligence bracket than those enjoyed by other types of popular literature. To us, reader opinions are important whether they come from a fan fourteen years old or ninety-three. And speaking of the latter, we come to the next letter . . . wh

AFTER NEARLY A CENTURY!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I'm ninety-three years old and have just latched on to science fiction. What I've been missing all these many years!

I bought my first copy of IMAGINATION yesterday, and after reading it through I have to report that I enjoyed it. So much so that after having read many types of literature in my life, I have come to the conclusion that science fiction is the best. Approximately 86 years ago I ran across a street and was crippled by a horse. I've only recently regained my ability to walk through operations, and thus I came across Madge at a newsstand. I'll be going there again!

Robert Boswick Hill, Jr.
190 S. Main St.
Cohasset, Mass.

Welcome—at long last—into the fold, Bob. And let's hear from you again . . . wh

ON SECOND THOUGHT!

Dear Bill:

After reading the January issue of Madge I decided it was one of the best stf magazines on the stands. However, the February issue changed my mind. I am now, convinced that IMAGINATION is the best!

I enjoyed tremendously, EARTH ALERT! by Neville and am looking forward to more stories by him, and also Philip K. Dick and Richard S. Shaver. I would find it hard to rate the stories, as I liked them all, with the exception of ELEGY, which somehow failed to please me.

I like the covers, the astronomical photographs on the back covers, and the short science articles. I would like to see several longer articles.

Just keep up the good stories and MADGE will remain tops in my estimation.

David Beeman
6508 Bayshore Walk
Long Beach 3, Cal.

You'll be seeing new stories by all your favorites, Dave—we aim to stay "tops" . . . wh

HEY, TEACHER!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I sure think the February issue of IMAGINATION was swell. EARTH ALERT! was really a fine novel—though it seemed to me that Neville had used a similar theme in his SPECIAL DELIVERY a year ago. The details were different, of course. Actually, though, I en-

joyed the whole issue.

I read something about a teen-age fan club being formed. I'm a teen-ager and I read IMAGINATION to enjoy adult fiction. I just hope that nobody tries to help us "little teen-agers" out. It would seem we're being pestered quite a bit lately by critics.

Speaking of teen-agers, science fiction is getting very popular in high school. The way you can tell is by watching some of the teachers. My English teacher, when assigning book reports the other day, said, "You can report on anything this time. That is," he then picked up a copy of Madge—honest—"anything but science fiction!"

At least he reads it!

Bill Jobin
Hi-way 83, Rt. 2
Elmhurst, Ill.

Last month Jerry Avery, an English teacher in Hillsboro, N. H. reported in the letter section that the education magazine, "Scholastic" was recommending science fiction books to teachers for their students. Perhaps you should bring your teacher up to date!wlh

NO SUPERLATIVES . . .

Dear Bill:

If you expect an outburst of superlatives from me describing Madge, I'm afraid I must disappoint you. Madge has not got the biggest, best, and most stories. It is not my favorite stf magazine, nor do I consider it terrific or sensational. However, it is better than average and I enjoy reading it, aside from the fact that I have to wade through several mediocre stories to find one I particularly like.

In the February issue of Madge the novel, EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville was definitely worth discovering, after wading through ELEGY, PIPER IN THE WOODS, and PIONEER. Also worthy of notice was THE INVADER.

I applaud John Carey's out-spoken letter, and I agree with him wholeheartedly. It's fans like him who maintain our controlling interest in stf magazines. On one point, however, I must disagree with him. I like abstract cover paintings, for to me they tell a story of their own—when well done.

One more thing: Why it is that the stories of some authors appear only in one magazine?

Daryl Sharp
RCAF

Greenwood, N.S., Canada

The biggest, and most, stories is no indication of a magazine's quality. The best, yes. How does Madge stack up in the latter department? Most readers seem to think quite favorably. And incidentally, Madge is one of the few books using a long length, 30-35,000 word story per issue, in addition to five or more other yarns. Actually this is not a policy, though most readers indicate they want a fairly long story each month—a yarn they can dig into. As to writers, some sell to one magazine because they prefer to work direct with that editor, being assured of a steady market for limited production. In regard to John Carey's letter, we'll let a fellow countryman of yours take the rostrumwlh

CALLING MR. CAREY!

Dear Bill:

What prompts this letter? See page 153 of the February issue, a letter titled: I DON'T LIKE—by John Carey. Now it's my turn.

I don't like this letter by Carey. And if it's any indication of the person who wrote it, I'm sure I wouldn't like him either. On first reading I thought surely John Carey was joking, but now I'm convinced he meant what he said.

I'll skip the first "I don't like—" because some people just don't like science fiction.

I like mature science fiction—and suggest John Carey read some once in awhile to find out what it is.

While I don't like continued stories, I do understand the editorial necessity of "continued on page—" for makeup purposes.

I like covers with good looking girls on them and I don't care who knows it. I'm only human.

A good cover is a good cover no matter what the interior contents, and a lot of excellent covers would never meet the eye if there had to be a connection.

I like the blurbs by the editor in conjunction with stories, as they help me decide what stories I'll read first. Also, long live the "long winded comments anent future issues". I'm sure Mr. Carey will find that high class general interest magazines devote considerable space to them.

Lastly, Mr. Carey mentions he doesn't like writing. Well that's fine. It settles a problem. Don't write!

It seems to me that we can do with a lot less of the pessimistic, negative attitude in this world. It happens to be overflowing with it!

My apologies to John Carey, for the above comments, as everyone has his likes and dislikes. His attitude just grated the wrong way with me.

Larry G. Slapack

P. O. Box 83

Armstrong, B. C., Canada

Most of our readers don't like continued stories either, Larry. Madge never uses them. Nor does Madge find it necessary to use "continued on page—". We have too many interesting features crying for the space at a story's end. Madge's covers always tie in with the feature story. We don't agree that many pleasing covers would be lost if there had to be a connection with the contents. Any good editor can see to it that a top-notch yarn is written around a cover. That's part of his job! Not taking the easy—lazy—way out. And usually, we might add, a cover gives an author that additional inspiration to excel in his work. For covers, Madge follows a simple policy: either a story is written around a cover or a cover is painted around an accepted story. Either way there's a direct connection wll

EXCLAMATIONS IN ORDER

Dear Bill:

All I can say about the February issue of Madge is—wow! EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville was fully as good as SPECIAL DELIVERY in the January 1952 issue. DARK GODDESS was standard Shaver—need I say more? And PIPER IN THE WOODS by Philip K. Dick was good too. The rest were about equal in quality.

I liked the cartoon accompanying the editorial—and the editorial, for that matter.

Keep these good issues coming!

Mike Chandler
514 N. St. Mary
Carthage, Texas

Speaking of cartoons, Mike, as we promised a short time ago, Madge is going to use quite a few per issue. We'd like to have your—and everybody's—reaction to this new policy. Do you want lots of cartoons? And all you science fiction cartoonists, take note that Madge is in the market. We report fast—within a week usually, and pay on acceptance wllh

WANTS MORE TOFFEE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

With a new year at hand, I just finished reading the February issue of Madge. I'd like to say something about EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville. From the opening sentence I was taken from this world and into the world of Julia and the mutants. From one chapter to another the story held me spellbound—I couldn't put it down. I'd like to cast another vote for more Neville!

And how about TOFFEE? We (all the readers!) want more of her!

Charles Nuetzel
16452 Moorpark St.
Encino, Cal.

Kris Neville is working on a new feature story for Madge right now, Chuck. And as to TOFFEE, Charlie Myers is a slow worker, but you will see more of his delightful young lady shortly wllh

AND A MAD SCRAMBLE

Dear Ed:

I am a young fan of stf. I have read many—almost all—of the digest magazines in the field for the last six months. But IMAGINATION is the only magazine I am considering sending a subscription to. I usually go down to the magazine store and look over all the magazines but invariably I buy IMAGINATION—I can't resist your terrific stories. Some of the ones that have made a vivid impression on me are: WEAPON FROM ETERNITY, Sept. '52; ARMAGEDDON, PATROL, and THE COSMIC BLUFF, Oct. '52; TIME GRABBER, Dec. '52; RESTRICTED TOOL, Jan. '53; and the latest—and best of them all — EARTH ALERT! in the February issue. If they keep getting any better each month I'm going to have to invent a time machine and get the latest issue from the 25th century!

One thing that puzzles me is why fans call your magazine "Madge". I don't get the connection . . .

I used to be kidded when I first started reading IMAGINATION, and when I tried to tell the local space jockeys that "Madge" was better than the rest of the field they just told me I was mistaken. Well, now I have to watch the magazine rack closely, because when IMAGINATION comes out there is a mad scramble and in a day or two they are all sold out!

Gordon Long
2847 Gordon St.
Allentown, Pa.

"Madge" is a nickname that has stuck with the magazine ever since the first issue some three years ago. The nickname has become so popu-

lar that many readers have suggested we adopt it as the title of the magazine! We're glad to hear that all the local space jockeys have started dating Madge. And why not—she's the Belle of science fiction! And don't forget, starting with the next issue, on sale April 28th, you've got a MONTHLY date with Madge, for with the June issue IMAGINATION will appear every four weeks . . . wh

MIDWEST STF CONFERENCE

Dear Bill:

We would appreciate it very much if you would insert the following announcement in Madge's letter section.

The Fourth Annual Midwest Science Fiction Conference will be held as usual at beautiful Indian Lake, Ohio.

The date: May 16th & 17th.

The Place: BEATLEY'S (on the lake) HOTEL, Russell's Point, Ohio.

The entire hotel and cottages has been reserved for the conference. No membership or dues—just come.

Write directly to the hotel for reservations after March 1st. Rates are very reasonable due to the pre-vacation season.

Lou Tabakow

Midwest Conference Committee

7419 Plainfield Rd.

Deer Park 36, Ohio

Glad to oblige, Lou. Hope we can make it for the fun . . . wh

CATALYTIC STORY!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I knew that someday someone would write a story and it would be

published in Madge, that would force me to get that first letter off to the editor.

It's finally happened.

The story that did it was EARTH ALERT! by Kris Neville in the February issue. It had a combination of themes that made it an incredibly absorbing story. Not only that, but being about flying saucers was sure to guarantee an aroused interest.

I've been reading Madge for about a year—my first copy was the May 1952 number with Galouye's fine TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL! Now I am a pretty steady stf reader—but Madge always takes preference for my 35c. Other magazines may have good stories, but IMAGINATION always has the best. I'd like to see more of Rog Phillips, Dan Galouye, Geoff St. Reynard, and of course, Kris Neville!

Here's hoping for another story to force a letter out of me.

Mary Joan Sherd

15B Viscaino St.

Ord Village, Cal.

We'll bet that future issues will keep you busy at your desk—writing letters! . . . wh

NOTE BACK ISSUES

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The February issue of IMAGINATION was really something special. EARTH ALERT! was first, both in the issue, and on my list of top favorite stories. Shaver's PIPER IN THE WOODS were good seconds. ELEGY and THE INVADER were also up there. PIONEER was a fair story, but I

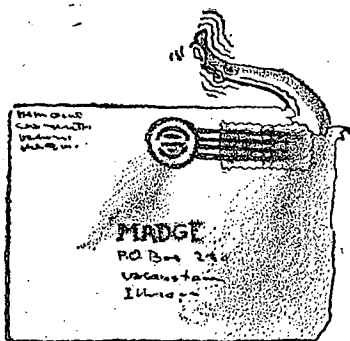
think Mr. Hardy can do better.

The features were excellent, as usual, and keep those cartoons coming!

Oh yes, I need back issues, and am enclosing my order.

Samuel J. Johnson
817 Gorden Ave.
Jacksonville, Fla.

Glad you liked the issue, Sam. But in regard to back issues, we'd like to have everyone take special note of the order blank on this page. The first six issues of Madge are completely sold out, so we can't accept further orders for them . . . See you next month wh



Back Issues of Imagination Available

—SEE NEXT PAGE TO SUBSCRIBE FOR COMING ISSUES—

November 1951, No. 7

January 1952, No. 8

March 1952, No. 9

May 1952, No. 10

July 1952, No. 11

September 1952, No. 12

☐ October 1952, No. 13

☐ December 1952, No. 14

☐ January 1953, No. 15

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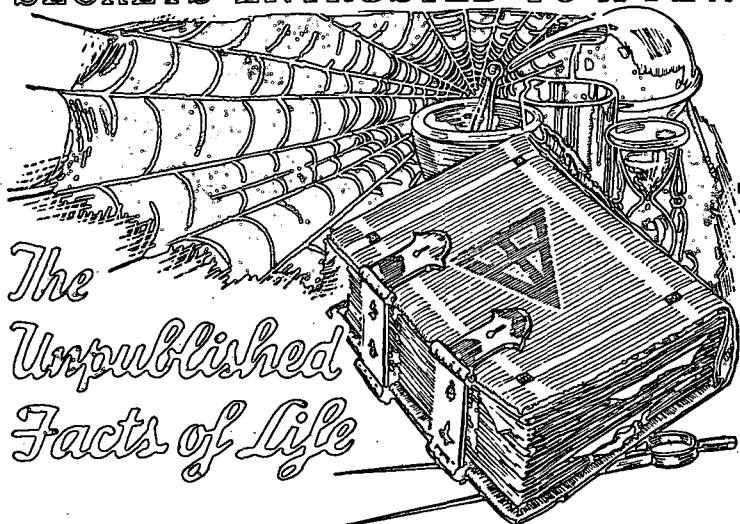
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